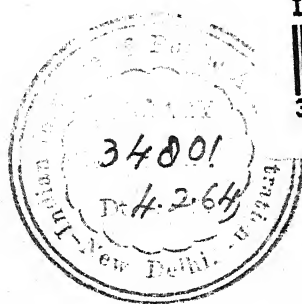


# RECONSTRUCTION AND EDUCATION IN RURAL INDIA

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PROGRAMME  
CARRIED ON AT SRINIKETAN  
THE INSTITUTE OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION  
FOUNDED BY  
RABINDRANATH TAGORE

*By*  
PREM CHAND LAL

*With an Introduction by*  
RABINDRANATH TAGORE



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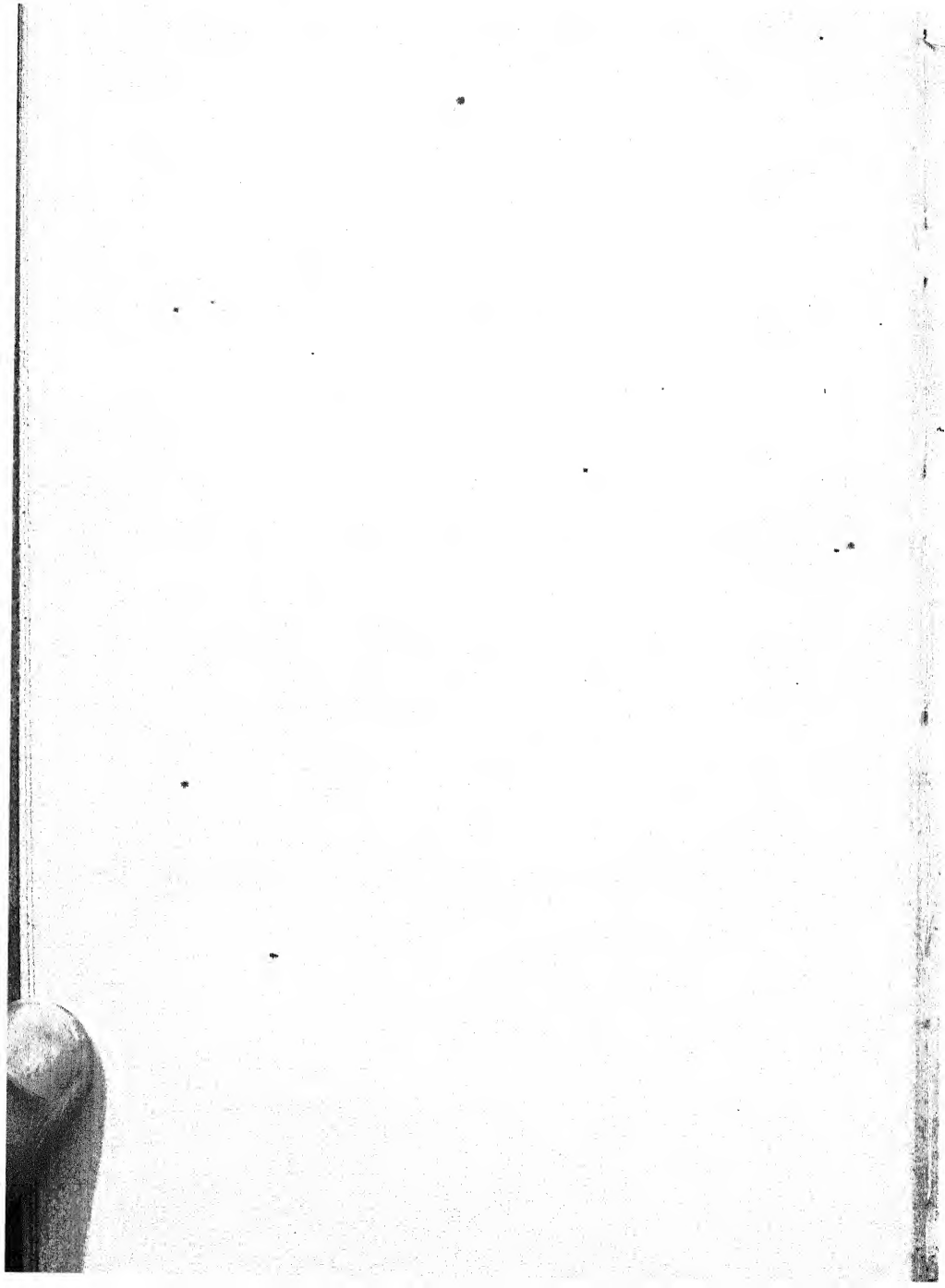


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## P R E F A C E

OF all the problems that India presents to-day, there are probably none so pressing, none so urgent, as the problems of rural reconstruction and rural education.

In this study I have described what Tagore, who is better known as a poet, philosopher, dramatist and novelist, is doing and has achieved with regard to these problems.

Cities like Bombay and Calcutta do not represent India, and yet they have been exploiting the villages and living on them, hence the degraded condition of the Indian villages.

As the title of the study indicates, the problems are of Bengal villages, but they can very well be the problems of the rest of rural India, and the same measures with very little modification could be employed in the work of rural reconstruction and rural education in those parts.

In places I have criticized the Government for its neglect of these rural problems, and for its being responsible in many ways for the poverty of the villages. These criticisms have been made in a helpful spirit and with the best of intentions, and not from any evil or revolutionary motives. As a humble citizen of the country, it is my right to point out to the Government where it has failed in its duty towards the country it has undertaken to govern. I have at the same time not spared the people themselves, who too are responsible for many of their miseries. The evils of the caste system, the social and religious customs, have not only hampered the path to progress, they have reduced the people further and further to misery and despair.

The keynote of the work of rural reconstruction is co-operation, which will be found running through all the pages of this study. The recommendations which I have made,

while based upon a study of a restricted area, may be found helpful to all those interested in these problems. They are by no means exhaustive, and if they are found to be of the least assistance I shall feel that my study has been successful in attaining its purpose.

PREM CHAND LAL.

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## INTRODUCTION

VILLAGES are like women. In their keeping is the cradle of the race. They are nearer to nature than towns, and are therefore in closer touch with the fountain of life. They have the atmosphere which possesses a natural power of healing. It is the function of the village, like that of woman, to provide people with their elemental needs, with food and joy, with the simple poetry of life, and with those ceremonies of beauty which the village spontaneously produces and in which she finds delight. But when constant strain is put upon her through the extortionate claim of ambition; when her resources are exploited through the excessive stimulus of temptation, then she becomes poor in life and her mind becomes dull and uncreative. From her time-honoured position of the wedded partner of the city she is degraded to that of maidservant, while, in its turn, the city, in its intense egotism and pride, remains unconscious of the devastation it constantly works upon the very source of its life and health and joy.

Cities there must be in man's civilization, just as in higher organisms there must be organized centres of life, such as the brain, heart or stomach. These never overwhelm the living wholeness of the body; on the contrary, by a perfect federation of their functions, they maintain its richness. But a tumour, round which the blood is congested, is the enemy of the whole body upon which it feeds as it swells. Our modern cities, in the same way, feed upon the whole social organism that runs through the villages; they continually drain away the life-stuff of the community, and slough off a huge amount of dead matter, while assuming a lurid counterfeit of prosperity. Thus, unlike a living heart, these cities imprison and kill the blood and create poison centres filled with the accumulation of death. When a very large body of men come

together for the sake of some material purpose, then it is as a congestion and not a congregation. When men are close together and yet develop no intimate bond of human friendship there ensues moral putrefaction. Wherever in the world this modern civilization is spreading its dominion, the life principle of society, which is the principle of personal relationship, is injured at the root.

All this is the result of an almost complete substitution of true civilization by what the West calls Progress. I am never against progress; but when, for its sake, civilization is ready to sell its soul, then I choose to remain primitive in my material possessions, hoping to achieve my civilization in the realm of the spirit.

People, as a whole, do and must live in the village, for it is their natural habitation. But the professions depend upon their special appliances and environment, and therefore barricade themselves with particular purposes, shutting out the greater part of universal nature, which is the cradle of life. The city, in all civilizations, represents this professionalism—some concentrated purpose of the people. That is to say, people have their home in the village and their offices in the city.

We all know that the office is for serving and enriching the home, and not for banishing it into insignificance. But we also know that when, goaded by greed, the gambling spirit gets hold of a man, he is willing to rob his home of all its life and joy and to pour them into the hungry jaws of the office. For a time such a man may prosper, but his prosperity is gained at the cost of happiness. His wife may shine in a blaze of jewellery, rousing envy along the path of her economic triumph, but her spirit withers in secret, thirsting for love and the simple delights of life.

Society encourages the professions only because they are of service to the people at large. They find their truth when they belong to the people. But the professions, because they get all power into their hands, begin to believe that people live

to maintain them. Thus we often see that a lawyer thrives by taking advantage of the weaknesses of his clients, their helpless dread of loss, their dishonest love of gain. The proportion between the help rendered and the reward demanded loses its legitimate limit when it is not guided by any standard of social ethics.

Such a moral perversion has reached its extreme length to-day in the relationship of the city and the village. The city, which is the professional aspect of society, has gradually come to believe that the village is its legitimate field for exploitation, that the village must at the cost of its own life maintain the city in all its brilliance of luxuries and excesses; that its wealth must be magnified even though that should involve the bankruptcy of happiness.

True happiness is not at all expensive, because it depends upon that natural spring of beauty and life which is harmony of relationship. Ambition pursues its path of self-seeking by breaking this bond of harmony, cutting gaps, creating dissensions. It feels no hesitation in trampling under foot the harvest field, which is for all, in order to snatch away in haste the object of its craving. To-day this ambition, wasteful and therefore disruptive of social life, has usurped the helm of society.

In India we had our family system, large and complex, each family a miniature society in itself. But its rapid decay in the present day clearly points out the nature and process of the principle of destruction which is at work in modern civilization. When life was simple and its needs normal, when selfish passions were under control, such a domestic system was perfectly natural and fully productive of happiness. The family resources were sufficient for all and the claims on them were never excessive on the part of one or more of its individual members. But such a group can never survive if the personal ambition of a single member begins separately to clamour for a great deal more than is necessary for him. When emulation in augmenting private possessions and the enjoyment of

exclusive advantage runs ahead of the common good and general happiness, the bond of harmony, which is the bond of sustenance, must give way, and brothers must separate, nay, even become enemies.

When our wants are moderate, the rations we claim do not exhaust the common store of nature, and the pace of their restoration does not hopelessly fall behind that of our consumption of them. This moderation, moreover, leaves us leisure to cultivate happiness, the happiness which is the artist soul of the human world, creating beauty of form and rhythm of life. But man to-day forgets that the divinity in him is revealed by the halo of his happiness.

The Germany of the period of Goethe was considered to be poor by the Germany of the period of Bismarck. Possibly the standard of civilization illumined by the mind of Plato, or by the life of the Emperor Asoka, is underrated by the proud children of modern times who compare it with the present age of progress, an age dominated by millionaires, diplomats and war-lords. Many things that are of common use to-day were absolutely lacking in those days. But are those who lived then to be pitied by the young boys of our time, who have more of the printing press, but less of the mind?

I often imagine that the moon, being smaller in size than the earth, begat life on her soil earlier than was possible on that of her companion. Once, she too had her constant festival of colour, music, movement; her storehouse was perpetually replenished with food for her children who were already there and who were to come. Then in course of time some race was born to her, gifted with a furious energy of intelligence, which began greedily to devour its surroundings. It produced beings who, because of the excess of their animal spirits, coupled with intellect, lacked the imagination to realize that the mere process of addition did not create fulfilment; that acquisition because of its bigness did not produce happiness; that movement did not constitute progress merely because of

its velocity; that progress could have meaning only in relation to some ideal of completeness. Through machinery of tremendous power they made such an addition to their natural capacity for gathering and holding that their career of plunder outstripped nature's power of recuperation. Their profit-makers created wants which were unnatural and dug big holes in the stored capital of nature, forcibly to extract provision for them. When they had reduced the limited store of material they waged furious wars among their different sections for the special allotment of the lion's share. In their scramble for the right of self-indulgence they laughed at moral law, and took it to be a sign of racial superiority to be ruthless in the satisfaction of their desires. They exhausted the water, cut down the trees, reduced the surface of the planet into a desert riddled with pits. They made its interior a rifled pocket, emptied of its valuables. At last one day, like a fruit whose pulp has been completely eaten by insects which it sheltered, the moon became a lifeless shell, a universal grave for the voracious creatures who had consumed the world to which they were born.

My imaginary selenites behaved exactly in the way that human beings are behaving on this earth, fast exhausting the stores of sustenance, not because they must live their normal life, but because they strain their capacity to live to a pitch of monstrous excess. Mother Earth has enough for the healthy appetite of her children, and something extra for rare cases of abnormality; but she has not nearly enough for the sudden growth of a whole world of spoilt and pampered children.

Man has been digging holes into the very foundations, not only of his livelihood, but also of his life; he is feeding upon his own body. The reckless wastage of humanity which ambition produces is now seen in the villages, where the light of life is being dimmed, the joy of existence dulled, the natural threads of social communion snapped, every day. It should be our mission to restore the full circulation of life's

blood into these maltreated limbs of society; to bring to the villages health and knowledge; wealth of space in which to live; wealth of time in which to work and to rest and to enjoy; respect which will give them dignity; sympathy which will make them realize their kinship with the world of men instead of their present subservient position.

Streams, lakes and oceans are there on this earth. They exist not for the hoarding of water exclusively within their own areas. They send up the vapour which forms into clouds and helps towards a wider distribution of rain. Cities have their functions of maintaining wealth and knowledge in concentrated forms of opulence; but this also should not be for their own sake; they should be centres of irrigation; they should gather in order to distribute; they should not magnify themselves, but should enrich the entire commonwealth. They should be like lamp-posts, and the light they support must transcend their own limits.

Such a relationship of mutual benefit between the city and the village can remain strong only so long as the spirit of co-operation and self-sacrifice is a living ideal in society. When some universal temptation overcomes this ideal, when some selfish passion gains ascendancy, then a gulf is formed which goes on widening between them; then the mutual relationship of city and village becomes that of exploiter and victim. This is a form of perversity whereby the body politic becomes its own enemy and whose termination is death.

We have started in India, in connection with our Viswa-Bharati, a work of village reconstruction, the mission of which is to retard this process of race suicide. If I were to try to give the details of our work they would look small. But we are not afraid of this appearance of smallness, for we have confidence in life. We know that if as a seed it represents the truth that is in us, it will overcome opposition and conquer space and time. According to us, the poverty problem is not the most important, the problem of unhappiness is the great problem. Wealth, which is the synonym for the production and

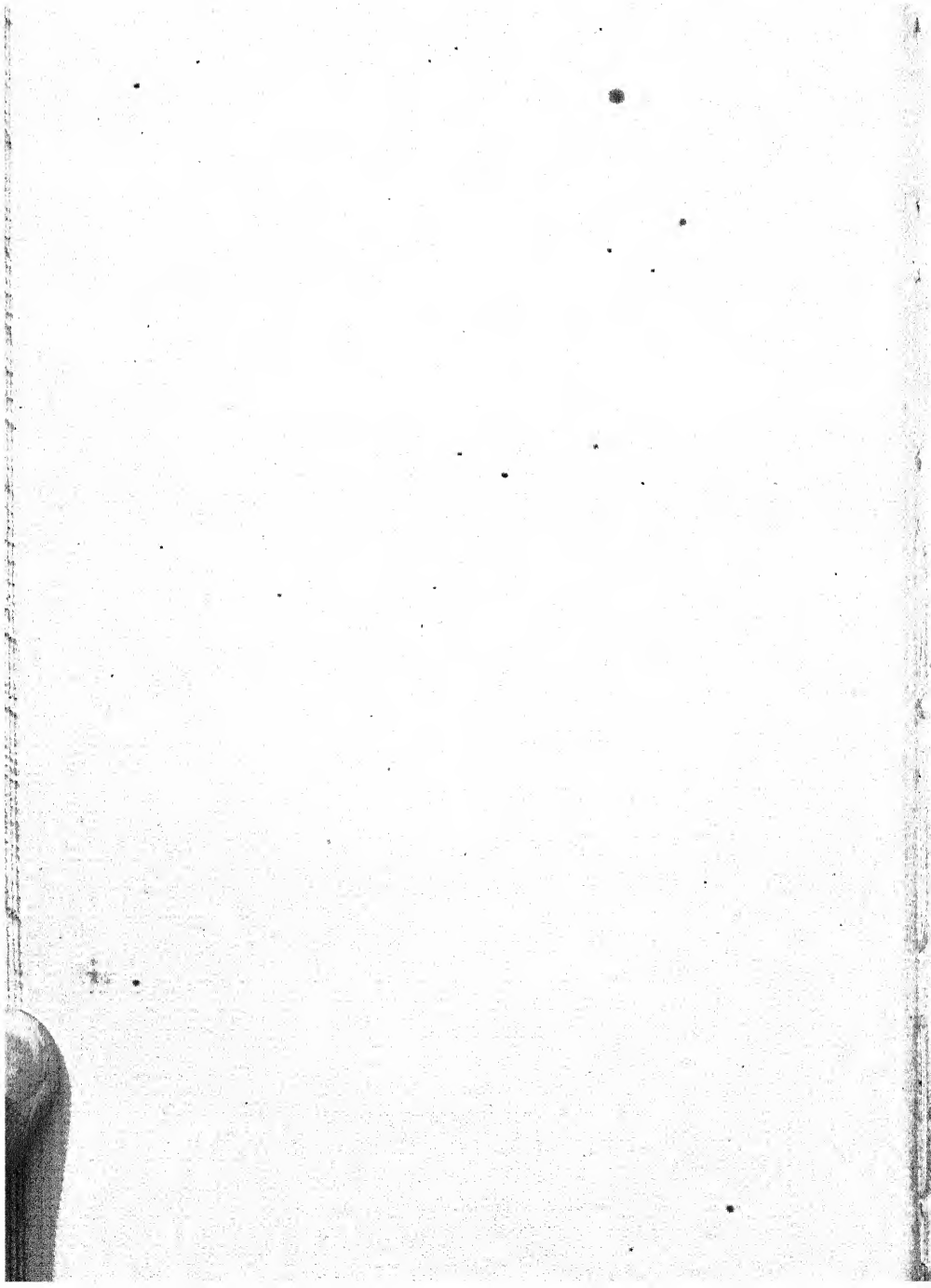
collection of things, men can make use of ruthlessly. They can crush life out of the earth and flourish. But happiness, which may not compete with wealth in its list of materials, is final; it is creative; therefore it has its source of riches within itself.

Our object is to try to flood the choked bed of village life with the stream of happiness. For this the scholars, the poets, the musicians, the artists, have to collaborate, to offer their contributions. Otherwise they must live like parasites, sucking life from the people and giving nothing back to them. Such exploitation gradually exhausts the soil of life, which needs constant replenishing, by the return to it of life, through the completion of the cycle of receiving and giving back.

Most of us who try to deal with the poverty problem think of nothing but a greater intensive effort of production, forgetting that this only means a greater exhaustion of materials, as well as of humanity. This only means giving exaggerated opportunity for profit to a few, at the cost of the many. It is food which nourishes, not money; it is fullness of life which makes one happy, not fullness of purse. Multiplying materials intensifies the inequality between those who have and those who have not, and this deals a fatal wound to the social system, through which the whole body is eventually bled to death.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

PART I



## ● CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

THAT there is a need for the reconstruction of villages and of village life can be seen from the various agencies, both official and non-official, which are at work to solve this problem. Tagore expresses his ideas in the following statements:

There was a time when our villages were in intimate contact with the manifold culture of this land. Towns were administrative centres serving certain special purposes, mostly of an official and professional character, while for the complete purposes of the people's life the villages were cherished and served by all the capable persons of the land with the most of their means and the best that their minds produced.

To-day, for various reasons, villages are fatally neglected. They are fast degenerating into serfdom, compelled to offer to the ungrateful towns cheerless and unintelligent labour for work carried on in an unhealthy and impoverished environment.<sup>1</sup>

The problem of rural reconstruction in India is not the same as was the problem of reconstructing the devastated areas of France and Belgium after the Great War. Their problem was only that of reconstructing the brick walls of houses destroyed by cannon shells and bombs. The problem of the Indian village is not so much to rebuild the tumbled-down houses and mud huts as it is to revive and develop the village life as a whole, in all its aspects—socially, culturally, economically, and from the point of view of sanitation and health.

More than three-fourths of the population of India depend for their maintenance solely upon agriculture, and consequently live in villages, and yet these villages, which form the real India and the bulk of the population, have been grossly neglected. Speaking upon the same subject Tagore elsewhere says:

In the past, at least in our country, there was not so wide a gulf between rich and poor. One reason was that riches came last in order

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<sup>1</sup> Viswa-Bharati Bulletin No. 11.

of merit, another was that the rich acknowledged their responsibilities. Honour and dishonour did not depend on the command or lack of money, nor was its enjoyment too exclusive, for the riches of one meant the welfare of many. And so wealth did not then create barriers between man and man, but rather gave facilities for varied intercourse. The "Anna," the Spirit of Nutrition, that was once realized as spiritually great, having now degenerated to the "anna" of material self-aggrandisement, that which had originally been the upholder of the community has become its destroyer; nay, by its enslavement of the mentality of man, it is out to destroy the world. That is why we see everywhere the stir of effort to bridge the yawning gulf between opulence and want.

The task that lies before us to-day is to make whole the broken-up communal life, to harmonize the divergence between village and town, between the classes and the masses, between pride of power and spirit of comradeship. . . . Science has given man immense power. The golden age will return when it is used in the service of humanity. The call of that supreme age is already heard. Man must be able to say to it, "May this power of yours never grow less; may it be victorious in works and in righteousness. . . ."

This latest manifestation of man's power must be brought into the heart of our villages. It is because we have omitted to do so that our watercourses and pools have run dry; malaria and disease, want and sin and crime, stalk the land; a cowardly resignation overwhelms us. Whichever way we turn, there is the picture of defeat, of the penury due to the depression of defeat. Everywhere our countrymen are crying, "We have failed." From our dried-up hollows, our fruitless fields, our never-ceasing funeral pyres, rises the wail, "We have failed; we have failed; we own defeat!" If we can but gain the science that gives power to this age, we may yet win; we may yet live.<sup>1</sup>

The problem of rural reconstruction is therefore manifold. It is economic, social, religious, educational, and of health and sanitation. In order that it may be adequately and effectively attacked, all forces are required really and truly to reconstruct the whole of the country. All the resources that modern science has to offer us will have to be utilized in this task. Civilization in every country has been changing, but it has never changed so rapidly as during the present age. India cannot live on its past glory. There have been many good things in the past civilization of every country; but, whatever they may have been, they were good only so

<sup>1</sup> Tagore, *City and Village*, pp. 6, 7, 9, 10.

far as those days were concerned. In order to suit the conditions of modern life and the present-day civilization we cannot go back to the past and seek shelter in her glories. We have to free ourselves from the fetters of the old civilization, keeping only what is best in it and building upon it with the materials that modern science has to offer us. Many of these modern ideas have to be imported from the West, but they will have to be modified to suit the Indian conditions.

The work of rural reconstruction, even of reconstructing the whole country, is being carried on to some extent even in some of the European countries. But probably no other country in the world presents so many problems as does India. It would not be altogether fair to criticize the Government for its neglect in attacking this problem, although the Government cannot be held blameless. The village industries so necessary for the prosperity of the vast population of rural India, and which for centuries have been the mainstay of the prosperity of the country, have all been destroyed by foreign industries. The agricultural industry, which is the main occupation of about 85 per cent. of the population, has also been allowed to decay. The land-tenure system, the illiteracy of the peasants, the lack of irrigation, and many other causes, do not permit it to flourish. The farmers can hardly make a bare living, and during years of drought they are driven to extreme poverty and starvation.

A few statements from authoritative documents will help to show how the country was flourishing at one time, and how the downfall of the indigenous industries came about.

Mr R. C. Dutt, in the preface to his book, *The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age*, says: "The sources of a nation's wealth are agriculture, commerce and manufactures, and sound financial administration. British rule has given India peace; but British administration has not promoted or widened these sources of national wealth in India." And further: "The production of raw material in India for British industries and the consumption of British manufactures

in India were the twofold objects of the early commercial policy of England."

On the other hand, the same author says:

Coarse Indian goods, which did not in any way compete with Lancashire goods, were taxed as well as finer fabrics. The miserable clothing of the miserable Indian labourer, earning less than 2½d. a day, was taxed by a jealous Government. The infant mill industry of Bombay, instead of receiving help and encouragement, was repressed by an excise duty unknown in any other part of the civilized world.<sup>1</sup>

When the East India Company's Charter was renewed in 1833 it was provided that the Company should thenceforth "discontinue and abstain from all commercial business, and should stand forth only as administrators and rulers of India." What followed after a few years will show how this abstinence was lived up to. As rulers, the Company felt a greater interest in the trades and manufacture of India, and on 11th February 1840 they presented a petition to Parliament for the removal of invidious duties which discouraged and repressed Indian industries. A select committee of the House of Commons was appointed to report on the petition. One extract from the evidence will show the state of affairs at that time. One, Mr Martin, in his evidence before the committee, stated:

I do not agree that India is an agricultural country; India is as much a manufacturing country as an agricultural; and he who would seek to reduce her to the position of an agricultural country seeks to lower her in the scale of civilization. I do not suppose that India is to become the agricultural farm of England; she is a manufacturing country, her manufactures of various descriptions have existed for ages, and have never been able to be competed with by any nation whenever fair play has been given to them. I speak not now of her Dacca muslins and her Cashmere shawls, but of various articles which she has manufactured in a manner superior to any part of the world. To reduce her now to an agricultural country would be an injustice to India.<sup>2</sup>

The breakdown of the old village industries and the inability of the people to take to other new trades is due also to

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Dutt, *The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age*, chap. vii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

a certain extent to the caste system. Originally people were divided into different groups on the basis of occupation. This distribution of people into different occupations must have been very carefully worked out, for the number of each group was in proportion to the need of the particular trade the group was following. For instance, there would be only one family of goldsmiths in a village, while the number of carpenters or weavers would be much larger. To suit the needs of the particular period perhaps this was the best system; but during the centuries that followed it degenerated, and the groups turned into rigid castes, which came to have birth as their basis. The doctrine of "Karma," implying reincarnation determined by one's actions (Karma) in the previous lives, also gave theoretical support to the caste system.

Whatever the origin, the evils of the caste system cannot be denied by any intelligent and progressive Indian. There have been leaders since the time of Raja Ram Mohan Roy who have tried to work against all these evils and to bring about social and religious reform. In days gone by, although the people were divided into castes, it merely meant that they performed the function of a trade guild, as in mediæval Europe; manual skill was preserved, division of labour secured, and wages regulated. Those of the higher castes, while enjoying certain privileges, yet realized their responsibility towards those under them. To-day, although the village industries have broken down, and caste does not in all cases function upon an occupational basis, the system still remains, and considerations of caste enter into every individual life.

India presents extremes probably greater than those of any other country. Geographically, it shows extremes in climate, from the coldest to the hottest; from the most fertile soil to the most barren and arid tracts; from the highest rainfall to the lowest; from the most healthy spots to the worst forms of epidemic-ridden regions. Economically, there are the fabulously rich people on the one hand, living in magnificent palaces, in ease and luxury, and the starving millions on the

other, living in dilapidated mud houses, and stricken with all kinds of diseases. Intellectually and spiritually, there are to be found in India some of the world's famous poets, philosophers, artists and scientists, as well as saints and seers who claim to have realized the Divine Truth, while on the other hand we find thousands steeped in ignorance and superstition. As to physical fitness also, India can boast of some of the finest specimens of strong, sturdy and healthy men and women, while at the same time showing some of the poorest specimens of all humanity. It is with the millions of semi-starved people, sunk in poverty and despair, living in the open country and yet in the most unsanitary conditions, and suffering from all sorts of diseases, that we are concerned here. In trying to solve these problems the entire social order has to be changed, and all the forces available will have to be employed. The Government has to be urged to take the matter in hand and spend more money on education and public health than it has done hitherto. In the very name of human justice, and in consideration of the worth of human life, the Government ought to come forward and do its share in removing the poverty of the people and freeing them from disease, most of which is preventable.<sup>1</sup>

Propaganda needs to be conducted on platforms as well as in the Press to stimulate the people. The masses need to be made to understand India's position in comparison with that of other countries. They also have to realize their own responsibility in the performance of the great task of reconstruction. In doing this the differences between the various communities, castes, creeds and races will need to be very carefully and cautiously adjusted. The people should be made to forget these differences for the sake of the common good, and to realize that anything they do to help each other will react not only to their own good but to that of the Motherland also.

It may take a long time yet to move the wheels of the

<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that more than five millions of people in India suffer the death penalty every year on account of diseases which are preventable.

Government, for no alien government, however sympathetic, nor even outside philanthropic agencies, however rich in their resources or single-minded in the pursuit of their ideals, can achieve much without the genuine co-operation and help of the people themselves. Therefore, in this mighty task of reconstructing rural India, the principal agents must be the Indians themselves. It is upon their shoulders that the chief responsibility rests. They have, then, not only the great task of rousing public opinion, and demanding their rights from the Government, but the far greater task of fighting much stronger forces within themselves. In this fight they have to face social and religious customs, landlords and princes, and all such forces as have kept the people back for centuries. Unless the people are willing to free themselves from evil customs and superstitions, to break the bonds of caste and themselves give freedom to the millions who are called untouchables, the country cannot expect to be free from the outside yoke. So, then, to attain true freedom, progress has to come from within. Many years ago Tagore expressed this, and his words stand as true to-day as they did then:

Whenever the people of one single village will have learned effectively to combine for the promotion of health, education, employment and enjoyment of life of each and all within that village, they will have lighted a torch in the path of Swaraj [Home Rule] for the whole of India. Thereafter it would not be difficult to light one torch from another, and so Swaraj will advance of itself, not only by the path traversed by the mechanical revolution of the "Charkha" [spinning-wheel] or such like, but along the route of multi-sided development illumined by its spirit of self-reliance.

## CHAPTER II

# ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF VISWA-BHARATI AND THE INSTITUTIONS OF SANTINIKETAN AND SRINIKETAN

### THE PROBLEM OF EDUCATION

BOTH foreign and Indian authors have written extensively on the problem of education in India. Government and Foreign Mission Boards have appointed commissions to study this problem, and volumes of reports have been published. Other writers, mostly of the tourist type and not acquainted with the history of India, have not gone deep enough into the question, and have been unkind and unjust in their criticism of the people for their ignorance and illiteracy. A very common argument often advanced against self-government for India is that of the illiteracy of the masses.

A few quotations from the writings and speeches of some prominent educators, authors and statesmen—American, Indian and British—will show the seriousness of this problem of education in India.

Mr William T. Harris, at one time the United States Commissioner of Education, in his address before the American National Council of Education at its meeting in Cleveland, in 1903, made the following statement:

England's educational policy in India is a blight on civilization. I have studied the problem pretty closely. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, Wilberforce, the English philanthropist, proposed to send school teachers to India, but a director of the East India Company objected, saying: "We have lost America from our folly in allowing the establishment of schools and colleges, and it would not do for us to repeat the same act of folly in regard to India." There are no free public schools in British India, and no compulsory system of primary education. Young Indians are hungry for education; and it is England's duty to do whatever she can to help the spread of education in that great country of ancient culture and wonderful philosophy.

India is primarily a rural country, and most of her population resides in villages. According to the *Ninth Quinquennial Review*, for the 730,000 villages there are only 162,666 primary schools, and even these are very poorly equipped, with teachers possessing little or no qualifications and getting ridiculously low salaries. While primary education has been almost totally neglected, higher institutions, on the other hand, are turning out thousands of graduates with an education that has caused serious unemployment among its possessors. This higher education is of a type that fits youths for clerical jobs or for petty Government positions, although both these services combined are not able to take care of the huge output of colleges and universities. The aim of such education is not to train free and worthy citizens qualified to earn a respectable living by means of some honest trade or profession. Professor Radhakrishnan, an eminent educator, in his presidential address before the All Bengal College and University Teachers' Association, says:

The educational policy of the Government trains men into docile tools of an external authority, it does not help them to become self-respecting citizens of a free nation. Love of one's native land is the basis of all progress. This principle is recognized in all countries. But in our unfortunate country it is the other way. A conquered race feels its heart sink. It loses hope, courage and confidence. Our political subjection carries with it the suggestion that we cannot consider ourselves the equals of free nations. Indian history is taught to impress on us the one lesson that "*India has failed.*" The worst form of bondage is that of despair and dejection which creeps on defeated peoples, breeding in them loss of faith in themselves. The aim of true education should be to keep alive the spark of national pride and self-respect. If we lose our wealth and resources we may recover them to-morrow, if not to-day; but if we lose our national consciousness, there is no hope for us.

Still another critic, Mrs Gertrude Williams, an American, in concluding her book, *Understanding India*, and after portraying India's evils plainly and fearlessly, inquires as to the remedy. To quote her own words her answer is:

It is education; it is schools; it is popular intelligence. All these superstitions and evils which we see in India have their root in the

illiteracy, the want of education of the masses of the people. Wipe out the illiteracy, give the people schools, and these jungle growths will be swept away. An educated India will not tolerate purdah, child-marriage, the disabilities of widows, and the rest. It is appalling to compare the influence of a body of 300,000,000 illiterate men and women with the potential power that education would give them for progress and advancement. Education would bring a new atmosphere of common sense and wholesome interests into Indian life, a release to the women and a stimulus to the men. Education would form an entering wedge for the emancipation of millions of untouchables. It would be a levelling influence between the castes, laying bare the artificialities of the system. It would weaken the superstitious credulity which makes the masses the easy prey of thousands of beggar priests. It would undermine the Indian's blind fatalism and make him begin to take account of economics and bacteria. It is the want of schools and education that makes the Indian people ignorant of the rudiments of sanitation and of hygiene, a prey to superstitious fears of gods and evils. India's only protection from ruthless exploitation, her only hope for the future, lies in *free compulsory education*, the three R's for the masses.

There has been no free compulsory primary education in Bengal or in any other part of British India until quite recently. In Bengal the Primary Education Act was passed only in 1930; but so far it has been enforced only in some of the city and town areas, and it will be some time before it can be extended into the rural districts.

Compulsory education is not merely a question of legislation. It is a question of finance, and the Government knows full well that if it were to make primary education compulsory it would also have to provide money for its support. But as long as proper adjustments for spending the revenue of the country are not made, education will never get its share, and will remain retarded and neglected.

It cannot be said that there did not exist any schools in India prior to the British rule, for even Mr Ramsay MacDonald makes the bold statement in his book, *The Government of India*, that:

Education in India is as old as Hindu ritual, and was originally connected with it, and the life of the student was the first stage in the great pilgrimage to his being's accomplishment. The relation of teacher and pupil was as close and tender as that of father and son;

the young man who sought instruction was praised, and he found schools and teachers available . . . but with the break-up of Indian government after Aurangzeb, misery and anarchy submerged education, and it sank to such a low level that it ceased to have any influence on the country. Still, the tradition survived, and if it cannot be said that education flourished, schools existed in very large numbers.<sup>1</sup>

Let us now see what Tagore says about the present system of education, both as to its quality and its quantity :

The portion of education allotted to us is so raggedly insufficient that it ought to outrage the sense of decency of a Western humanity. We have seen in these countries how the people are encouraged and trained and given every facility to fit themselves for the great movements of commerce and industry spreading over the world; while in India the only assistance we get is merely to be jeered at by the nation for lagging behind. . . . If we must believe our schoolmaster in his taunt that after nearly two centuries of his tutelage India not only remains unfit for self-government, but unable to display originality in her intellectual attainments, we must ascribe it to something in the nature of Western culture and our inherent incapacity to receive it, or to the judicious niggardliness of the nation that has taken upon itself the burden of civilizing the East.<sup>2</sup>

Figures quoted in educational reports about the amount of money spent on education by the Government are often misleading. This is brought out clearly by Mahatma Gandhi, who made a study of these figures in 1920. In the year 1918-1919 the total expenditure on primary, secondary and higher education, including all educational departments, was Rs.1,129 lacs, which was met as follows:

Government Treasury . . . . .	392 lacs of rupees
Local Funds . . . . .	174 " " "
Municipal Funds . . . . .	49 " " "
Fees . . . . .	319 " " "
Public Funds (private sources) . . . . .	195 " " "
<hr/>	
1,129 lacs of rupees	

(One lac is a hundred thousand, and one crore ten million. A rupee is about 33 ½ or 1s. 6d.)

From these figures we can see that while the Government spent Rs.3.92 crores of rupees, and the municipalities and

<sup>1</sup> Ramsay MacDonald, *The Government of India*, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> Tagore, *Nationalism*, pp. 31-32.

local boards Rs.2.23 crores, the people, in addition to the taxes, part of which should count towards education, paid directly from their pockets Rs.5.14 crores. So, after all, the Government is not actually spending as much money as one is liable to think from the reports. A further study of these figures will also reveal the fact that quite a large proportion of this money is spent on administration, leaving very little for actual education.<sup>1</sup>

#### HISTORY OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

The history of the present system of schools, colleges and universities which are maintained at public expense dates from the time of the advent of the British rule in India, and especially from the time of Lord Macaulay, the great historian and *littérateur*, who was well read in Roman history, and who was the most important among the personnel of the Government of India at that time. He knew how the Romans had been confronted with the same kind of problem, although not of the same magnitude, and how they dealt with it. He therefore conceived the scheme of making a class of brown Englishmen who would look out beyond the seas for inspiration, regard Britain as their spiritual home, and look down upon the culture and tradition of their mother-country. In his own historic words he wanted to "form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern, a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect."

Under this system of education we find that in Indian schools and colleges great importance is given to English literature and English history, while our own literature is shamefully neglected and our history begins with Clive and Warren Hastings, who are described as great heroes. Our own heroes—Rana Pratap, Shivaji, Ranjit Singh, Tippoo

<sup>1</sup> Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*, "Hallucination of Schools and Colleges," 17th November 1920.

Sultan and the Rani of Jhansi, and a host of others—are not given their rightful place.

One thing, however, this system did accomplish—it brought together the different peoples of the country speaking different languages, through the medium of English; and through this language, science, which is the greatest contribution the West has to offer to us, became available to our students.

There are in India to-day sixteen universities planned more or less after the English universities. These comprise 232 colleges and 10,373 schools, including High and Middle English and Vernacular schools.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the universities are merely examining bodies, with a number of colleges and schools affiliated to them. The system of examination is very strict, and only a certain percentage of students are allowed to pass. The curriculum is very narrow, and does not prepare students to meet life situations, but merely to become petty Government officials or to fill the posts of clerks in business and Government offices.

#### FOUNDING OF SANTINIKETAN AND MAHARSHI DEVENDRANATH TAGORE

In founding the school at Santiniketan, Tagore did not mean to ignore the best in Western civilization and in Western culture. He merely intended that it should be based on the indigenous culture and tradition, retaining only what is best in them, while freely taking the best that the West had to give us.

<sup>1</sup> According to the *Ninth Quinquennial Review*, vol. i., "Progress of Education in India," by Littlehailes, there were in 1918-1919 the following:

	<i>No. of Schools</i>	<i>No. of Scholars</i>
High Schools . . . . .	2,444	744,444
Middle English Schools . . . . .	3,201	349,233
Middle Vernacular Schools . . . . .	4,728	621,984
	<hr/> 10,373	<hr/> 1,715,661

As against these figures, the total number of primary schools is 162,666, with a total number of boys in these primary schools of 6,707,479.

No "Progressive Education Movement" in India, or in any other country in the East, can afford to ignore the great contribution the West has made in education, and any attempt at non-co-operation with the West, in the field of education at least, would be suicidal, in that it would hinder the progress every true citizen wishes the country to make along modern lines.

Few people know that Tagore's father, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, had anything to do with the founding of the Santiniketan school. A brief account of how it came into existence, therefore, will not be out of place.

The name of Maharshi (Great Saint) Devendranath Tagore is not well known to the outside world. That he was great there is no doubt, for the very title of Maharshi bestowed upon him proves it. He was born in the ancestral mansion of the Tagore family in Calcutta in 1817. One of the early pillars of the Brahma Samaj, founded by Raja Ram Mohun Roy, he also became the spiritual head of the Samaj. He believed that the Vedas, the Upanishads and other ancient writings were not to be accepted as infallible guides, but that reason and conscience were to be the supreme authority, and that the teachings of the scriptures were to be accepted only in so far as they harmonized with the light within us.

He travelled extensively all over North India at a time when there were very few railways and travelling was by no means easy or convenient. During one of his travels he came to the place on which stands Santiniketan to-day. At that time this place was noted as the haunt of robbers and dacoits. In the face of these dangers the Maharshi pitched his tent under the Chhatim trees, which are still to be found, and engaged himself in meditation and prayer. What really attracted him to this place it is not possible to know, for the region is neither fertile nor beautiful. There is no river flowing close by, nor are there any streams; even the soil is extremely poor. It is situated, however, on a high land, and is a quiet and comparatively healthy place. This bare and

barren piece of land the Maharshi soon transformed by covering it with rich soil brought from another place, and by transplanting all kinds of fruit-trees and flowering shrubs. In the midst of these trees he built a house, and added a temple later on. It was not long before the place became habitable and attractive, and it was only when it became so that the Maharshi dedicated it for the use of the public as an Ashram (place for meditation) under a trust deed, and endowed it with an annuity of Rs.6000. Under this trust deed the place was open for use to anybody, irrespective of caste, creed or sect, who wished to meditate on God in peace and quietness, and free from the controversies of other faiths. The only things forbidden were speaking ill of other religious faiths, use of animal food and intoxicants, and obscene amusements and the worship of idols.

The spot where Maharshi spent his time in meditation under the shade of two stately Chhatim trees is marked by a simple marble slab, on which is inscribed his favourite text, which reveals his great soul. Translated, the text runs thus:

He is the repose of my life,  
The joy of my heart,  
The peace of my spirit.  
(From the Upanishads.)

For nearly thirty years there was no activity going on, with the exception of a few visitors who came from time to time. There was nobody to worship in the temple, although a paid minister was kept to carry on a formal daily worship. And yet the Maharshi was not anxious about the future of the place, nor did he ever regret having founded the Ashram.

When, therefore, about thirty years later, Rabindranath Tagore expressed his desire to found a school, he received his father's hearty approval and support. Little did Maharshi realize what this school would develop into, and how far its influence would extend. He had endowed the place for the meditation of individuals—his son endowed it with life itself.

Professor Findlay, in writing about Rabindranath Tagore, says:

There are two great men in our epoch, John Dewey in the West and Rabindranath Tagore in the East, whose wisdom not only illumines the general mind, but has stooped to the level of children. Both men are now passing into old age, but it was in the prime of life, during the closing years of the last century, that both of them resolved to keep school.<sup>1</sup>

With Tagore, the environment, the Ashram, the star and the sky, friends and neighbours, are the means whereby an inner happiness is fostered. Dewey seems to leave such influences to the subconscious; his means whereby the American boy and girl are to solve the riddle of life spring from impulses of curiosity and intelligence.<sup>2</sup>

It was on the 7th Pous 1309, of the Bengali era (about the 21st December 1901), that the school was formally opened. Tagore's immediate object in founding the school was to have a place where children would live a happy life and enjoy as much freedom as possible. He himself had rather an unhappy experience in his own school life, with the result that he ran away from it, never to return. He says that he even dreaded the approach of his tutor who came to teach him English. The existing educational system was, and still is, devoid of life, and strictly disciplinary, so that no child is happy to go to school. It was this revolt against these conditions which inspired him to free the children from the tyranny of the rod, and from severe repression and strict discipline. Under this system education is divorced from life, and what the children study at school has little or no connection with the outside life. There is no definite aim in this system of education, even in the minds of those in authority, and if there is it is to turn out pupils who know the three R's and, if they can go further than that, to fit them for petty governmental positions or for clerical jobs. Every day the children are more and more burdened with an increasing number of subjects, and the examinations are made harder and harder, the idea being to turn out as few "hall-marked" graduates as possible. But

<sup>1</sup> J. J. Findlay, *Foundation of Education*, vol. ii., p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

in spite of all these difficulties the number of college graduates is increasing every day, and the problem of unemployment is getting worse and more acute among the educated classes. There being no system of vocational guidance, there is often a great and unnecessary waste of time and money on the part of the students and their guardians in getting the kind of education for which they are best fitted. In very few cases do students choose their courses with a definite purpose. All they want is a degree; and since so much importance is attached to degrees it is not to be wondered at that both parents and students are so anxious to get them.

Tagore wanted his school to be a place where (1) children would be happy to go because there they would have the utmost freedom and would not be forced into anything which they did not wish to do; (2) where, under the environment of the Ashram, they would find a natural outlet for all their capacities and a greater chance of their development; (3) where Nature would be the chief teacher—others would act only as guides and not as taskmasters; (4) where the gulf which exists in most schools between the teachers and the pupils would be bridged by a spirit of friendship and brotherliness; (5) where the personality of the child would be respected and not suppressed; (6) where, under the environment of the Ashram, the pupils would find the best opportunity for their physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual development; (7) where, as members of their school community, they would learn their lesson of citizenship in a larger society, and the activities of the school would be closely connected with those of the society; (8) where the pupils would draw inspiration from their own folk-literature, and popular traditions, and receive instruction through the medium of their own vernacular.

Tagore's philosophy and his principles of education were not the outcome of any training he had received at a pedagogical institute or a university, for he had attended neither. His philosophy was the philosophy of an artist and of a poetic genius. Being an artist and a poet, and therefore of a highly

sensitive nature, he realized and appreciated this sensitiveness in others, and especially in children. Following these principles the small Vidyalaya (school), which was started about thirty years ago as a small boarding-school for boys, and which centred round a couple of small huts, grew into a large institution that not only took in boys and girls, but also extended its activities in other directions as well. Round the original building, which was called Santiniketan, and which is now used as a guest-house, have been erected boys' and girls' dormitories, teachers' quarters, music and art buildings, a well-equipped hospital,<sup>1</sup> a library containing books on all subjects in many languages, both Indian and European, and several hundred old manuscripts collected from all parts of India and from Tibet, playgrounds, and a guest-house with all modern facilities for the use of scholars from Europe and other countries. In addition to all these extensions the addition of the Institute of Rural Reconstruction, with its various buildings and departments, has made the programme of education complete for the harmonious development of the cultural, economic and social life of the people. Tagore describes the threefold purpose in the founding of the Viswa-Bharati in the following words:

1. To concentrate in Santiniketan, in the midst of the Ashram, the different cultures of the East, especially those that have originated in India or found shelter within her shores.

2. To lay in Sriniketan, "The Institute of Rural Reconstruction," the foundations of a happy, contented and humane life in the villages; and finally,

3. Through Viswa-Bharati as a whole, to seek to establish a living relationship between East and West, to promote inter-cultural and inter-racial amity and understanding, and fulfil the highest mission of the present age—the unification of mankind.

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<sup>1</sup> This hospital was built in memory of Mr W. W. Pearson, an Englishman of high ideals, and one who had identified himself with the cause of India. He had joined the Ashram with Mr C. F. Andrews, and had endeared himself to the children and everyone there. He met with a fatal accident while travelling in Italy on his way back to India in 1924, and his premature death was a great blow to the poet personally, and to his numerous friends and the school an irreparable loss.

## THE FOUNDING OF VISWA-BHARATI

It was during the poet's visit to Japan and the United States of America in 1916, the year in which he delivered his lectures on "Nationalism," that Tagore saw the signs of evil created by narrow ideas of nationalism, which had resulted in the great conflict between nations—the World War.

After his return to India he conceived an idea of founding an institution where scholars of the East and West could meet and find a solution in bringing about a better understanding between the different peoples of the Occident and of the Orient through a study of their cultures, philosophies, art and music. He realized only too well that science had brought the peoples of the world much closer to one another physically, but it had failed to bring the hearts and spirits of these people together. For a better understanding of the different peoples science is unable to help us; it has to be sought through the spirit.

To this institution, which he called "Viswa-Bharati" (where the whole world finds its one single nest), he first invited scholars from different parts of India representing the different cultures of India alone. Scholars from China and Tibet were also invited to come and join, and invitations were sent to some of the most outstanding and eminent scholars of the West, who were not only learned men in their respective fields of studies, but were also men with high ideals; and because of their high ideals they gladly responded to the poet's call. They came and stayed, not only as local guests but as honoured guests of the whole country. In ancient times scholars and Buddhist missionaries from India had gone across the mountains into Tibet and into China, taking great risks and suffering great privations, carrying with them the gospel of the Lord Buddha and the culture of their country. Similarly, Chinese scholars had come to India in quest of the Great Truth. These Western scholars also came to this Viswa-Bharati, not in quest of expanding their trade and territories—they were neither soldiers nor political diplomats. They

came as cultural ambassadors imbued with the best that is in the Western culture; humbly they came to offer it to the East. At the same time, they were eager to take away the best that they could find in the Eastern culture, and which, through lifelong studies, they had already made their own.<sup>1</sup> Besides these several others, men and women talented in art and other branches of learning, came and made Santiniketan their home.

This Viswa-Bharati was founded in 1921, after the poet's second visit to Europe and America, where he saw for himself the ravages of war.

Professor Sten Konow, of Oslo, Norway, Visiting Professor at Viswa-Bharati in 1924-1925, describes the condition of Europe at the close of the war, and the poet's ideas about finding a solution to world peace and better understanding among the different peoples of the world:

It is a poet's vision, but it came at a time when men were in sore need. The Gospel of Jesus had proved powerless when people rose against people in Europe and in the name of the King of Peace told men to take to arms. The Church invoked His name to support the cause of each contending country, and from the pulpit exhorted men to kill men.

The outlook in the West was hopeless when the poet came from the East, and asked us to seek salvation through faith in new ideals. Wise men of the world smiled, but there were individuals who felt that there was still hope for humanity. The poet's vision must some day come true. The nations of the world must join hands in a common endeavour to make anew the history of the world.

There are differences and there are conflicts of interests, and it will be idle to ignore them. But it is the aim of the Viswa-Bharati to study such differences with a view to reconciling them. Life is harmony and rich in variety. Death alone is uniform. The aim of the Viswa-Bharati is life-giving, it is to achieve unity in diversity.

I take it to be a good omen that the Viswa-Bharati had its origin in India. India has never attempted to conquer the world by force and violence. Millions in India have kept their faith in lofty ideals. We shall move forward, inspired by the spirit of India, and fulfil the poet's vision.

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<sup>1</sup> Among these scholars may be mentioned the names of Professor Sylvian Levy, of the Sorbonne, Paris; Professors M. Winternitz and Lesney, of Prague; Professors Carlo Formich and G. Tucci, of the University of Rome; Professor Sten Konow, of the University of Christiania, Oslo, Norway; and Dr A. Bake, of the University of Leyden, Holland.

## A DAY AT SANTINIKETAN

The activities and environment of the school at Santiniketan can best be described by a day's visit to the school.

Bolpur, the railway station for Santiniketan, is on the loop-line of the East Indian Railway, and is reached from Calcutta in about four and a half hours, although the distance is only ninety-nine miles. Santiniketan is about two miles from Bolpur. The most convenient train is the one which reaches Bolpur some time about midnight. Upon intimation, the school bus meets all the trains. After passing through the dimly lighted bazaar of Bolpur town one comes upon an arid-looking plain with practically nothing on it except a few shrubs here and there, and some rows of tall palm-trees standing out majestically on the skyline. After passing through this plain some more dim lights are seen in the distance. These are the lights of the small village of Bhubandanga. Another few minutes and it seems as though there is some kind of habitable place because of the thick groves of trees. There are hardly any lights to be seen, for the electric lights at the Ashram go out at eleven o'clock. Soon the guest-house is reached, and the manager, with a couple of servants with hurricane lanterns in their hands, is seen standing on the steps waiting to receive the visitors. Their luggage is taken down and transported to their rooms. The manager in a few words explains the geography of the house, gives the time for breakfast, and any necessary information. At break of dawn, about five o'clock, the Ashram bells begin to ring, and everyone is astir. The visitors slip out of their beds and go on to the terrace, and see the boys and girls squatting here and there, some under a tree and some right in the open, engaged in meditation. They look like little Munis (holy men who lived in hermitages in the forests). After a few minutes of silent meditation a whistle blows, and they all come together in small groups and chant

some prayer in unison.<sup>1</sup> By this time the visitors also are ready for their tour through the Ashram.

The number of visitors, both Indian and European, has been steadily increasing, and it is not possible to spare the services of a teacher to take these visitors round. The senior students have taken this responsibility of looking after the guests and of showing them the various activities of the school. One of these students reports himself to the manager of the guest-house and takes the visitors on a tour of inspection. As they descend from the guest-house the first place that catches their eye is the Mandir (chapel), which was built by Maharshi himself. It is a cast-iron framework filled in with tinted glass, with its floor paved with marble. Except for a small, low marble stool at one end there is no furniture of any kind, nor is it adorned with pictures or idols indicative of any particular religion or creed. Regular weekly services are held in this temple, but no sectarian religion is preached. Each person is allowed to feel and to think the deepest that he can, according to his own belief. Turning towards the school one notices that there are no classrooms as such—all classes are held in the open air under the shade of trees, or in the verandahs of dormitories in case of rain. Certain phases of the school work, however, cannot be carried on in the open air, and for such rooms are provided. It is difficult for Western people, and even for Indians who have been brought up according to the Western ideas of education, to imagine a school without classrooms and their complicated equipment, which are considered so indispensable to a progressive school. The climate in the greater part of India, and especially in West Bengal, is such that, except for the rainy season, one can conveniently remain out of doors. Against the hot sun the trees, which mean so much to an Indian, afford protection. The reason certain

<sup>1</sup> Mantra (prayer) of the morning: "Thou art our Father, May we know Thee as our Father, May we truly salute Thee." Mantra (prayer) of the evening: "The God who is in herbs, in trees, in water and in fire, who pervades the whole universe—to that God we offer our salutation again and again."

trees are considered sacred by the Hindus is that they afford shelter to the weary travellers against the hot and penetrating rays of the tropical sun.

Under the shade of trees, which are an integral part of the Ashram, are to be seen, then, groups of boys and girls sitting on their small, square mats. The classes are all small, to ensure individual attention. The children seem quite free and easy, and yet quite interested in their work. They are not burdened with the disciplinary rod and with the severe and stern look of the teachers, with whom they have very intimate relations. The younger teachers and the senior boys and girls are addressed as elder brothers and elder sisters, "Dada" or "Didi," which has created the relationship of friendliness and brotherliness between the pupils and the teachers, and among the pupils themselves.

In the elementary section, where one sees life most active, there is a building, used for manual training, built entirely by boys of nine, ten and eleven years of age, except for the thatched roof. It is something of their own creation. These boys made the plans, collected the materials, and built it with their own hands; they are naturally very proud of it. They have also built a small poultry-shed, and have made a flower-garden in front of their dormitory, which they look after with the greatest care. In the workshop are arranged a number of articles, useful and artistic, which are their own creation.

The library is another special feature of the school, and in many ways it is unique in India. Besides a good and representative collection of books in English, French, German, Italian, Persian and Arabic languages, on various subjects, it also contains a rich collection of works in Sanskrit, in the different Indian languages, and in Chinese and Tibetan. To these collections have been added a very valuable and remarkable collection of more than three thousand old manuscripts from all parts of India and Tibet. The library is especially equipped for research work in Indology, including Islamic, Zoroastrian and Sino-Tibetan studies. Scholars of all these

studies are to be found eagerly searching for the hidden truths in these rich treasures. There is also a separate juvenile section attached to this library, in which carefully selected books are kept within easy reach of the children; and of course the librarian is always there to help them in choosing and finding the kind of books they want.

From the library one goes to the school of art, which was added to the school in 1918, with only two or three students. Since then it has made remarkable progress, and has developed into an institution which is recognized throughout the country. It includes both Indian painting and Indian music. The guiding spirit behind the school of painting is Dr Abanindranath Tagore, one of the poet's cousins, who is the recognized founder of the Modern Bengal School of Art. It is under the directorship of one of Dr Abanindranath Tagore's most distinguished pupils, Mr Nand Lal Bose. The music section is under the directorship of Mr Dinendranath Tagore, the poet's grand-nephew, who is a gifted musician, and who is a living storehouse of all the Tagore songs. It might be mentioned here that the poet has composed and set to music over two thousand songs in Bengali, and has initiated a new movement in Indian music, and made Santiniketan the centre of this new movement. The seasonal festivals given here have acquired a reputation over all India. The music section is also reviving a kind of old folk-dancing, in which both boys and girls take part.

One of the features of the art department is the museum, in which there is a collection of original paintings and specimens of indigenous arts and crafts from different parts of India. There is also a valuable collection of paintings, screens, musical instruments and other articles, brought by the poet from China, Japan, Java and other Far Eastern countries. The subjects of study in the art school include not only music and painting but many other arts and crafts, such as embroidery, fresco-painting, lacquer-work, pottery, bookbinding, illumination and litho-printing.

In the music section there are facilities for both vocal and instrumental music, and many girls are taking to it as a serious pursuit in life.

Music and art are not confined to the students of Kala Bhavan only. They are the two subjects, if for convenience they may be so called, which every pupil learns, although not under compulsion. It is chiefly through music that both the students and teachers at Santiniketan have understood the poetry of Tagore, as they have also understood his ideas by acting his plays. This is according to Tagore's own philosophy of education, that pupils learn best through the subconscious mind. While acting in a play the actors unconsciously assimilate the ideas underlying the plot. Most of the students have learned Tagore's poetry by heart, largely through music.

School is over at four-thirty, and after some light refreshments everyone hurries on to the playing-fields. There is no compulsion, but nearly every single pupil takes part in the games. Football is the favourite game, but cricket, tennis and volley-ball are played with equal vigour. In volley-ball particularly are to be seen some of the teachers playing vigorously and with the keenest interest, even those who never played any games in their lives. Girls also have their own games: Lathi-playing (skilful manipulation and swinging of long sticks for self-protection) and jiu-jitsu and dagger-playing have also been introduced, and have found favour with both boys and girls. Thus the athletic side of the school also is given an important place in the programme.

The senior teachers and some of the senior students of the college or research departments who do not take part in the games go out for a walk in groups of twos and threes. Just about this time the poet also is seen coming out of his retreat, taking a stroll through the Ashram. With his flowing silvery beard, and dressed in pure white, he looks like a prophet of old—tall and stately, though a little bent with age. He is truly the guiding spirit of the whole Ashram, round whom have

gathered pupils and teachers, scholars and mystics, from remote parts of India and even from beyond the seas.

In the evening after supper there is a dramatic performance, in which both boys and girls take part. The Bengali children are born actors and seem perfectly at ease on the stage. Music is also part of the programme, which is put on entirely by the students. One thing visitors fail to find during their observation of classes is religious teaching. There is no religious instruction as such given at the school, and yet there is to be found a deep spiritual atmosphere, which can be better felt than described.

Santiniketan looks much like an ancient hermitage, and yet it is thoroughly modern. Here one finds life and education for life—all the modern educational principles are being practised here—learning by doing, social activities, and an all-round development of the whole man, not omitting the idea of service to one's fellow-men. It is one large family; the members are from different religions, castes and creeds, from different parts of India, even from Europe and the Far East. And yet they seem to fit in with the atmosphere, all working for a common cause and in perfect harmony with one another.

## CHAPTER III

# SRINIKETAN, THE INSTITUTE OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

### THE LOCATION OF SRINIKETAN

SRINIKETAN is situated in the district of Birbhum, about a mile and a half from Santiniketan, and about three miles from Bolpur, the railway station. During the time of the East India Company, on this very spot, and about a quarter of a mile away, were the residence and indigo factories of the Company. The last of the Company's residents was one Mr Cheap, whose palatial buildings, although now in utter ruin, are still to be seen. The elephants' stables and the strong masonry work are signs of the magnificence in which Mr Cheap and other Company servants lived. Report has it that during his time Mr Cheap used to export from this locality alone goods (lacquer, sugar, cotton and indigo) worth about £75,000 every year to England. To-day, not only this locality but the whole district produces next to nothing worthy of export, except a little rice, which is the only crop in the district.

Surul, the village adjoining Sriniketan, was during this period quite an important and flourishing village. The present Zemindars (landlords) of the locality used to serve as clerks of the Company. After the Permanent Settlement (of the land) the insolvent rajahs' lands came into the market, and some of these rich clerks purchased the lot at a very low price. Cheap's residence and the lands about it came into the possession of the people who are now called the Surul Zemindars, while the property on which Sriniketan is situated was passed on to the East Indian Railway Company, which built its workshops on it. After a while, on account of some changes in the plans of the railway, they removed the workshops to another place, and the property was sold to one of

the members of the Sinha family of Raepur, Sir S. P. Sinha, who was the only Indian raised to a peerage, becoming Lord Sinha, Baron of Raepur. A few years later Tagore purchased this property from Lord Sinha, and during the early days of Santiniketan he lived in the large two-storeyed brick building, the only one standing intact and in good condition on the property.

Tagore had entertained all along a desire to start some agricultural work on this land, which was lying idle. There were times when the school at Santiniketan passed through great financial stringency, and often teachers tried to persuade the poet to sell off this property in order to help to carry on the work of his school. But the poet was always firm, and would not sell it at any cost. He had his ideas and plans for it; but at the time he had neither the money nor a man who could initiate the desired project.

It was in 1921, when on a visit to the United States of America, while staying with some friends in the city of New York, that he met a young Englishman, Leonard K. Elmhirst, a graduate of Cambridge, then studying agriculture at Cornell. Mr Elmhirst had been in India, and knew the condition of the Indian villages and their needs. During the few minutes that he and the poet talked he was invited by the latter to come to his international university and initiate some kind of agricultural work. At that time their ideas as to the form this work should take were not quite clear. Eight months later, when they discussed their plans in Santiniketan (India), they discovered that they were almost identical. Mr Elmhirst did not come out empty-handed either, for a noble and generous-hearted American woman, well known for her philanthropy, not only in the United States but in the Orient as well—Mrs Willard Straight, now Mrs L. K. Elmhirst—came forward with the necessary funds for this work. What more could be wanted when these three great personalities were brought together in the cause of humanity?—Tagore, with his visions and dreams penetrating into the very souls of the peasantry

round him; Elmhirst, with his leadership, sympathy and love for the poor villagers of this part of Bengal, and Mrs Straight, with her gift of money, without which neither of the other two could proceed with any work of this kind. Mr Elmhirst remained at the Institute for only a little over a year, but he laid the foundations of the work, and pioneered it in a way that will always bear testimony to his insight and energy.

A GENERAL SURVEY OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL,  
SANITARY AND HEALTH CONDITIONS OF THE LOCALITY

Travelling through these country districts one cannot fail to see the devastation that has taken place in these villages. In many places almost entire villages have been swept away. Beautiful old temples are crumbling to pieces without any attempt at repair, while no new ones are being built. The same is true of the tanks on which the villages depend for their water-supply, both for drinking and for irrigation purposes. For want of annual cleaning and re-excavation these are gradually being silted up. The tall *tāl* (a kind of palm) trees which were planted on the banks of these tanks, and which not only added to the beauty of the tanks but were also of great financial worth to their owners, are gradually being cut down and sold, without new ones being planted in their places. Thus, on account of deforestation and the silting up of these irrigation tanks, acres and acres of land are lying waste and uncultivated.

The soil, unlike that in other parts of Bengal, is extremely poor, being of red laterite desert, which although it was once covered with thick forest is now almost entirely barren, the land being eroded by rain for miles because of the deforestation. So great is the scarcity of food in this region that not even wild animals are to be found on these lands, and yet only a hundred years ago this district was very flourishing.

The cultivable land being reduced to very small areas, there

is not enough for the people to grow sufficient food crops for themselves; consequently there is practically no land left for the cattle to graze; and, there being no fodder, the cattle in this district are all emaciated, small and extremely poor, both as draught animals and for milk. They are taken out in the mornings to pick up what they can find on these barren grounds, and in the evenings, when they return, they look as hungry as they were when they started out to graze. Some of the working oxen are given a little rice-straw, which contains hardly any food substance, and during the ploughing season, when they are very hard worked, they are given a little oil-cake or wheat-bran. But these the ordinary cultivator can hardly afford.

The land is further impoverished by the diverting of natural fertilizer. The manure yielded by these cattle, which should be utilized for enriching the soil, is dried and used for fuel, there being no other fuel available.

The various trades and crafts, which at one time were fully represented in each village, and which may still be found in some parts of the country, making the village a self-supporting unit, have nearly all disappeared. They have been driven out by the big industries of Western countries, by social and religious customs and traditions, and by caste restrictions. A weaver's business may be ruined by the Lancashire cotton mills, but on account of the rigid caste system he is not privileged to follow any other profession. And he has very little opportunity to learn another trade. The only other occupation he can follow, then, is agriculture; but because in many instances he is physically unfit, and because usually he owns no land, he may not be able to engage in that occupation.

With the dying of the trades and the impoverishment of the soil came poverty; and with the advent of poverty the physical condition of the people became extremely poor. These conditions, together with various other elements, brought in malaria. The people in their poor physical condition cannot resist any disease, and every year malaria alone is responsible

for thousands of deaths in the district. Cholera also finds its way almost every year into some part of the district, and on account of ignorance in regard to sanitary measures thousands become victims of this and many other diseases.

The people, stricken with extreme poverty and exploited by others, lost their trust in one another. Everyone became suspicious of everyone else. There was a time, however, when a village presented the appearance of a large family, and even now it is true of some of the flourishing villages. Each person recognized his duty towards the others, and nobody was allowed to go hungry.

Due to the introduction of a complex system of law-courts and the passing away of the old Panchayat system (five people of the village chosen by the people to settle all disputes) the ever-increasing multitude of lawyers, who have to make a living somehow, often incite the people one against the other and get them to take their cases to the courts. The result is that in most cases both parties are utterly ruined, while the pockets of the lawyers bulge with profits and the Government gets its fees to finance an expensive administrative system. The poor villagers in this way are exploited on all sides. Nobody unacquainted with the law-courts in India can have any idea of the damage this system has caused to the simple village folk. Very few cases are settled at the first hearing, and civil suits drag along for months, sometimes for years. The amount of time and money wasted is enormous.

A typical example of the devastation of the villages is that of Ballabpur,<sup>1</sup> a village situated on the bank of the river (a mere rivulet) Kopai, about a mile from Sriniketan. The river runs dry in summer, but is flooded during the rains, covering the low-lying lands to the north with its water, and thus making them very fertile. The lands lying to the west and south, being high, do not have the same advantage, and as a result are very poor. They are composed of red laterite soil,

<sup>1</sup> *Ballabpur*. A survey made by the Institute and edited by K. M. Ghose.

with a mixture of sand and pebbles. To the south-west of the village is a large tract of land which at one time was a dense forest, but which now, laid waste and washed away, makes deep, ravine-like erosions, running almost up to Sriniketan. From this forest the village came to be called Ban Ballabpur (Ballabpur of the forests).

During the time of the East India Company this village was in a very flourishing condition, with about 500 families.<sup>1</sup>

After the death of Mr Cheap, the last Commercial Agent of the East India Company, the export trade came to a stop, and from that time on the village steadily declined; so much so that in 1926 there were only twenty-four families left, with a total population of eighty-four. Due to poverty, and later to the effects of malaria and other epidemics, almost entire families were swept away, while a few migrated to other places.

These twenty-four families are about equally divided between the higher and lower castes, although the total number in the lower castes exceeds that of the higher castes by ten, thereby showing that the birth-rate among the higher castes is lower. This may be due to the fact that the widows among the higher castes do not remarry, as they do among the people of the lower castes.

According to this survey these families are classified as follows:

*Higher Castes—*

Brahmins	.	6 families	} Total number 38 Average 3·2 per family
Weavers	.	3 "	
Potters	.	1 family	
Barbers	.	1 "	
Tamlis	.	1 "	

*Lower Castes—*

Tanners	.	7 families	} Total number 46 Average 3·8 per family
Hadis	.	2 "	
Doms	.	3 "	

<sup>1</sup> It is still a custom in the villages to give the population in terms of the number of homes or families. On the average we can take five in each family, and thus reckon the population to be about 2500.

The women in this village outnumber the men by nine, chiefly on account of their being widows. There are fourteen boys in the village and only nine girls. With the exception of a very few nearly all the people, including the Brahmins, are engaged in agriculture. The weavers also do a certain amount of farming, because they cannot earn enough from the weaving of cloth. The potter earns his entire living from his trade. The tanners had forgotten their own occupation, and one of them was taken over to the Institute to be instructed in the tanning of hides. He has set up his own business in the village. There are no carpenters nor blacksmiths in the village. They are obtained from the neighbouring village when their services are required.

Paddy (rice) is the main crop, although on the more fertile land washed by the river, and later irrigated, some potatoes and sugar-cane are grown.

The area of the village is 3744 bighas (about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  make an acre), which is divided as follows:

Waste and Khoai (eroded)	.	.	.	.	2,748.36	bighas
Homesteads	.	.	.	.	42.00	"
Tanks	.	.	.	.	42.00	"
Fallow and left for grazing	.	.	.	.	201.00	"
Under Cultivation	.	.	.	.	457.00	"
Other Lands	.	.	.	.	255.64	"

About a hundred or so more bighas of land could easily be brought under cultivation, but for want of irrigation facilities and because of the poverty of the people it has not been utilized so far. The landlord reserves for his own use about a third of the cultivated land (155 bighas), and the remaining 302 bighas are given over to the tenants.

Of these twenty-four families twenty-three are in debt, incurred chiefly through Shradha (death) ceremonies and illnesses. The only person who is free from indebtedness is a tanner. He owns twenty bighas of land, which he cultivates, besides doing his own business on a small scale.

There is an old temple in the village, but it is in such bad

condition that it is liable to fall down any day. The annual festival (worship of the goddess Durga or Kali) is held in the house of a Brahmin, a portion of which is set apart for this purpose. Another religious festival, the Dharma Puja, of which the Doms (people of one of the lowest castes) are supposed to be the priests, is also held in the village, and everyone, irrespective of caste distinction, takes part in it.

Until about thirty years ago there was in the village a Tol (school for the teaching of Sanskrit and religious books), kept by one of the Brahmins, who had seven or eight pupils with him, treating them as members of his own family. He provided them with food and instruction. The pupils brought only their own clothing with them. This system of education would not do for the present age; but it has not been replaced by any new system of education, and there was no school at all before the work of rural reconstruction was begun.

Conditions are changing even in India, and changing very rapidly. In the West efforts are being made to keep up with this changing civilization. In India there has been no serious effort on the part of anybody to take adequate measures to cope with the village problems. It is not a matter which concerns the Government only, nor can the people unaided keep pace with all the changes that are taking place, both in India and outside. It is the joint concern of both, a matter in which the people should take the initiative with the Government to lend its help whenever required. The high caste and the man from the low caste, the intellectual and the illiterate, the wealthy and the poor, the religious as well as the secular agencies, the official and the non-official—all have their duty in this programme of the reconstruction of the rural areas. On the welfare and prosperity of these areas depend the welfare and prosperity of the whole country and, to a certain extent, of the whole world.

By means of modern science the world, as it were, has contracted; it has come closer together than ever before. The

peoples of the world have never been so interdependent as they are now. The Government of India can no longer assume the *laissez-faire* attitude; the people, on the other hand, can no longer remain blind and callous with regard to the extreme poverty, superstition, corruption, and the hundreds of evils that are keeping them down. While India can rightly be proud of many things she possesses, no citizen of India who loves his country can deny that there are many hideous, ugly, and even inhuman, customs still prevalent there. It is time that the people of India awoke to the needs of the present. Facts have to be faced in their nakedness; they have to be evaluated without any prejudice whatsoever. Everything that is evil and detrimental to the progress and healthy growth of the country must be discarded. There must be a new structure, modern in conception, in materials and in workmanship. When the people of India understand the full significance of these sacred words, which are familiar to every Hindu: "God our Father, teach us that Thou art our Father"; when the Theistic Hindu really and truly sees the divine in every being, irrespective of caste or creed; when the Moslem learns toleration, and the Christian worships Christ and not the Christianity which is alienating him from his own people and from his country; when the temple doors are thrown open to all, whether they belong to the high or the low caste; when the wretched word "caste" disappears from the Indian vocabulary, and religion, real and living religion, takes its place, then only can we hope for the dawn of a new era.

Some encouragement for rural India, however, may be found in the fact that the people, enlightened by education and urged by economic pressure, are beginning to prepare themselves for occupations other than those particular ones they were to follow on account of their birth. In many instances survival actually depends upon a change of occupation, and there are numerous instances in which people have changed their occupation. At the Institute we have a Brahmin and a Muchi (a Muchi is a leather-worker and therefore an

outcast), and practically all other castes are represented. They come to learn weaving, carpentry and other crafts. In the struggle for existence people are gradually getting away from caste restrictions.

There seems to be a general awakening all over the country, in cities as well as in the villages, and just as the slogan of "Swaraj," or "political freedom," so also has the term "Rural Reconstruction" penetrated even to the country areas. The latter, however, has not met with the same response as the former. Few people understand the full significance of the term, and very few agencies are treating the problem seriously and in all its aspects. The Young Men's Christian Association is doing very useful work in the south of India. As a matter of fact it was the late Mr K. T. Paul, National General Secretary of the Y.M.C.A. in India, who introduced this term.

To solve these manifold problems of the devastated villages round about Sriniketan, which are typical of so large a part of India, and to launch an active programme of rural reconstruction, the Department of Agriculture and Village Economics, as it was then called, was started in the spring of 1922, under the leadership of Leonard K. Elmhirst. It was initiated in order to solve two of the most pressing problems, not only of Bengal, but of the whole of India. The first problem is that of the village people, whose communal organization and economic life have been completely upset during the last hundred years, and whose present deplorable condition is a national calamity. The second is the problem of the educated middle classes, once dwellers in the country, who have drifted into the towns. Here most of them are unable to earn a bare subsistence. The soil from which they came is still farmed by wasteful and uneconomic methods of two thousand years ago.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE INSTITUTE OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

(1) To win the friendship and affection of the villagers and cultivators by taking a real interest in all that concerns their life and welfare, and by making a lively effort to assist them in solving their most pressing problems;

(2) To take the problems of the village and the field to the classroom for study and discussion and to the experimental farm for solution;

(3) To carry the knowledge and experience gained in the classroom and the experimental farm to the villagers in the endeavour to improve their sanitation and health, to develop their resources and credit, to help them to sell their produce and buy their requirements to the best advantage; to teach them better methods of growing crops and vegetables and of keeping live stock; to encourage them to learn and practise arts and crafts, and to bring home to them the benefits of associated life, mutual aid and common endeavour;

(4) To work out practically an all-round system of elementary education in the villages based on the Boy Scout ideal and training, with the object of developing ideas of citizenship and public duty such as may appeal to the villagers and be within their means and capacity;

(5) To encourage in the staff and students of the department itself a spirit of sincere service and willing sacrifice in the interests of and on terms of comradeship with their poorer, less educated and greatly harassed neighbours in the villages;

(6) To train the students to a due sense of their own intrinsic worth, physical and moral, and in particular to teach them to do with their own hands everything which a village householder or a cultivator does or should do for a living, if possible, more efficiently;

(7) To put the students in the way of acquiring practical experience in cultivation, dairying, animal husbandry, poultry-keeping, carpentry, smithing, weaving, tanning, practical sanitation work; and in the art and spirit of co-operation;

(8) To give the students elementary instruction in the sciences connected with their practical work, to train them to think and observe accurately, and to express and record the knowledge acquired by them for their own benefit and for that of their fellow-men.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Viswa-Bharati Bulletin No. 6: *Institute of Rural Reconstruction: Prospectus of Apprenticeship and Training Camp*, pp. 2-3.

## CHAPTER IV

### ACTIVITIES OF THE INSTITUTE

#### AGRICULTURE

EVERY productive department of the Institute has a twofold function to perform: (1) to demonstrate to the farmers scientific and improved methods of agriculture at the Institute's farm, and to introduce new crops, vegetables and small fruits which can be economically raised in the locality; and (2) to give training to a number of apprentices who intend to go back to their farms and take to farming as a vocation.

Due chiefly to the present system of education, the number of unemployed among college and university men is increasing every year, and young men of respectable and high-caste families are turning their minds to all kinds of trades and industries. A number of them want to go back to the land. For those who have lands of their own a diversified form of farming offers a very good livelihood, and is a very healthy occupation, at the same time giving them opportunity to be of some service to their fellow-villagers.

Until three years ago the farmlands of the Institute amounted to only about 25 acres. This included the farm homesteads, cattle-sheds and an irrigation tank. Since then approximately 700 more acres have been added. Most of this acquired land, however, is eroded (khoai) and waste, and it will require a considerable amount of time and capital expenditure to bring it under cultivation. However, it is on such lands that economically successful experiments have to be demonstrated to the farmers before they can be expected to use improved methods of agriculture.

Special emphasis is laid upon the selection of seeds, rotation of crops, green-manuring, preservation of manure, conservation of moisture, and the use of improved implements which are quite within the reach of the peasants.

*Vegetable Gardening and Small-Fruit Growing*

One reason for the poor health of the people is that they do not have sufficient green and fresh vegetables; fruits are considered a luxury by the mass of the people. On account of the monkey pest,<sup>1</sup> even such fruits as can be grown in the locality have been given up by the people.

The fruit and vegetable garden was under the care of a Japanese gardener until a few years ago, when he died prematurely. In his death the Institute suffered an irreparable loss. He was a perfect example of industry and hard work, and succeeded in raising all kinds of vegetables on a piece of land declared by agricultural experts to be absolutely unfit for growing vegetables. People from long distances came to see his garden, and were amazed at the beautiful crops and large variety of Indian, English, Japanese and Chinese vegetables.

Many of the health problems will be solved when vegetables and small-fruit growing can be successfully introduced in the villages. Very few people in Bengal are strict vegetarians; fish is the favourite meat diet. In West Bengal, however, due to the scarcity of rain, and consequently the high price of fish, the mass of the people cannot afford to include either meat or fish in their daily diet.

It is the purpose of the Institute to introduce vegetable gardening in every village family, so that they may improve their health through their diet without any additional cost.

*Dairy*

The condition of the dairy industry in Bengal is deplorable almost beyond description. It is particularly so in West Bengal. The obvious reason is scarcity of fodder. As a result the cattle are small, emaciated, and seem hardly to have any life at all. Even during the rainy season, when in other parts

<sup>1</sup> Monkeys are considered to be sacred animals, and there is a very strong sentiment among the Hindus against killing them.

of India there is plenty of grazing to be had, in this part of Bengal there is only an inch or two of grass to be found on the lands where these cattle are allowed to graze. How these cattle manage to exist at all during the greater part of the year is most surprising, for they certainly seem to spend all their energy in going round all day trying to find a tuft of grass here and a tuft there; and yet at home they would be lucky if they were given a sheaf or two of rice-straw, a roughage of very poor quality. As for concentrates, they rarely have any; only the working bullocks are so fortunate, during the ploughing season, when their work is extremely heavy.

Under such conditions it is little wonder that the cattle are so poor and do not yield milk. On the average, a cow in full milk yields about a pint of milk per day. Other cows of the same size and breed, if well cared for and properly fed, yield as much as four to six quarts per day.

As regards breeding, on account of the ignorance and superstitious ideas and customs of the people, no systematic or scientific system is carried on. Diseased, old and utterly useless bulls are allowed to go about freely with the cows, and there is strong prejudice on the part of the Hindu cattle-breeders against castration.

The object of the dairy at the Institute is also twofold: (1) to supply both Sriniketan and Santiniketan with fresh, pure milk; and (2) to breed cattle, not only at the Institute, but to induce the cultivators to follow the scientific and systematic system of breeding, so that they may have not only good milch cows but also sturdy draught animals.

Cattle-breeding is the foundation of Indian agriculture, and will remain so for a long time to come, and yet very little attention has been paid to the improvement of cattle. The Government has a number of cattle-breeding farms, but so far the people have not taken advantage of them, not in Bengal at least. Very forceful propaganda is needed, and people have to be educated so that they may overcome their superstitions. Only then can this most important industry be improved.

So far as the production of milk is concerned, perhaps it would be more advisable to improve the goats, for they can always find some sort of grazing among shrubs and bushes on which the cows could not thrive. Whatever it may be, the goat or the cow, it is very essential that something should be done so that the people may have milk.

Efforts are being made to raise fodder and to show the cultivators its importance; but here it is not possible to do very much, since the amount of land which the average cultivator possesses is barely enough to raise foodstuffs for his family.

### *Poultry*

In India little or no attention is given to the poultry industry. This could be very profitable, even as a subsidiary industry. Religious prejudices do not allow most of the cultivators to keep poultry; only the Mohammedans and the low-caste people are free from these prejudices. On account of lack of selection in breeding the laying capacity of the hens is extremely small. On the average an Indian hen lays from thirty to forty eggs per year. As regards feeding, the people spend nothing on feeds; the birds pick what they can find in the fields or in the heaps of rubbish lying about in the village. There are certain Indian breeds, however, which do lay more eggs of a fairly large size. If these hens were systematically and scientifically bred they could be developed into very good fowls, suited to the climate of the country.

The poultry section, while trying to introduce better breeds into the villages, also trains a number of apprentices. So far, all the apprentices have come from high castes, most of them college men, who intend to start poultry farms of their own. A few have already begun their work and are making good at it. The poultry farm, in addition to introducing the Chittagongs, one of the best Indian breeds, has imported some White Leghorns and Rhode Island Reds, and experiments are being carried on to test the suitability of the breeds for the local

conditions. Experiments have also been made in crossing the village hens with White Leghorn cocks, and the results have been very encouraging. In a few villages, after inducing the people to get rid of their cocks, some Leghorn and Chittagong cocks have been distributed. The results are being watched with great interest.

#### INDUSTRIES

Under the old village system, some of which is still to be found in parts of India, there is a distinction between the village menial and the independent artisan. Under the former, in descending order of respectability of trades, may be listed barbers, carpenters, weavers, blacksmiths, tanners, laundrymen and scavengers—the last three being considered as belonging to very low castes. Under the heading of independent artisans may be put down, in the same order, goldsmiths, potters, oilmen, tailors and dyers.

People belonging to the first groups were paid in kind—a share from the harvest—and they were also entitled to presents at weddings and at other important festivals. The tanners, in addition to their share in the harvest, also received as their perquisite hides of dead animals. The services of goldsmiths, potters, tailors, oilmen and dyers, being of a different character, in that they were not directly connected with the daily domestic or farm life, were paid for in cash whenever required, and thus they were considered as independent artisans.

This system of paying for services in kind is gradually being broken down by modern economic conditions. For instance, on account of the great demand for hides, and because of the ready money they bring, the people sell them to the hide-merchants. Leather goods, shoes, etc., being now available anywhere, the services of the tanners can be easily dispensed with. This has thrown thousands of tanners out of work.

Spinning was carried on in almost every family; and whenever people had sufficient yarn they would take it to the village weaver to have it made into cloth. The weaver, of course,

received his payment in kind at harvest time; but he was also entitled to a portion of the yarn for his labour. On account of the cheap, machine-made cloth the weaver too has been thrown out of work. In this way almost all the village artisans have suffered on account of the introduction of cheap, machine-made articles imported from outside. Some of these artisans, finding that it was more profitable to be in cities and towns, have migrated there, leaving their villages without their particular trade. Carpenters and blacksmiths, for instance, can make a much better living in towns than they can in villages.

The main object of this department, then, is to revive the local industries and introduce such others as might be profitable to the village people. With this aim in view a careful study of the local industries and their present condition was made in the surrounding villages within a certain area.

### *Weaving*

The aims of this section are:

1. To give instruction to a number of apprentices.
2. To teach better designs to the weavers of the locality and to help them by supplying them with raw materials at a price cheaper than they would have to pay if they bought them at the local market, at the same time helping them to market their products. Unless the weavers can be organized into a co-operative group, and saved from the clutches of the middlemen, they cannot expect to derive any appreciable profits from their work. Where they have no such co-operative facilities they can hardly make a living. In Bôlpur town, which is the nearest place where the weavers of the locality can purchase their yarn, there is only one store that sells the raw materials, and here the poor weavers are at the mercy of the storekeeper. The materials cost them so much that they cannot compete favourably with the machine-made cloth. And if they have to sell their produce at these stores they lose again from the profits of the middlemen.

In addition to the training of apprentices at the Institute, the weaving section is also training a number of women in the villages, chiefly widows, and also supervises the work of those who have received their training at the Institute, but who are still in need of some guidance. Some of the night schools in the villages, organized by the Village Welfare Department, have introduced weaving in their programme of work. This, again, is supervised by this section. The section is under the charge of a trained instructor, who has considerable practical experience. He is assisted by another man whom he trained, and who knows not only his own trade, but understands the spirit of the Institute. The section is equipped with a number of fly-shuttle looms and frames for making carpets, cotton mats and tapes, and also with all the accessories of calico-printing and dyeing.

The courses are very flexible, and are adapted to the needs of individual students according to the amount of time they are prepared to spend at the Institute. They range from three months to two years. Among the apprentices and students who come to this section are young boys from the villages, not necessarily from the weavers' caste. As a matter of fact they come from all castes, from the Brahmin (the highest caste) to the Muchis (one of the lowest castes), with all the other castes between. Then there are teachers deputed from Union and District Board Schools to learn weaving and gardening; also social workers from private organizations.

There are always very heavy demands from outside institutions for the services of the instructor, who is sent out on these missions whenever he can be spared. Many public institutions, such as the "Bani Bhavan," a women's institute founded by Lady Jagadish Chandra Bose, in Calcutta, and the Anatha Ashram (orphanage) in Dacca, have started vocational education in weaving as a result of the training they received from the instructor at Sriniketan. Requests also come from the various district industrial and agricultural exhibitions for a display of our products and for demonstration work.

Allowing for the services that the instructor and his associate devote to the educational work, the section is expected to be on a business footing, and thus show a profit in its working. This is very rigidly insisted upon, for it is only when these different sections are put on such a business basis that we can expect people to take to this industry.

The results achieved in all the departments will be discussed in detail in the chapter on evaluation. Here it is sufficient to say that as a result of the training given in this section the weavers of the locality have considerably increased their income, others have started weaving as a whole-time industry, yet, in many instances, these people are not weavers by caste. They are all making a very decent living from this trade. Several schools and institutions, not only in the district but also outside, have included weaving in their curriculum, some as a vocational course, others as part of the manual training or industrial arts course.

### *Tannery*

It is estimated that there are about 3600 Muchis (leather-workers) in the district. A great majority of them are landless, and in most cases have forgotten their own trade. Some of them are farming on small pieces of land on rentals, others earn their living as day-labourers. Their condition is very miserable.

The tannery was started as an experiment, in the face of many difficulties. First of all with regard to the getting of raw materials. All the villages round about, with the exception of two, are Hindu villages; therefore no cows are slaughtered in them for the consumption of flesh. Even in the two Mohammedan villages it is only on the occasion of their annual festivals that they kill cows, and then only a few. The only hides available are from dead carcasses, and from the point of view of tanning these are of very poor quality. It was possible to get hides of good quality from Calcutta, but then the cost of production would have been too heavy; moreover, it would

not have been doing any service to the Muchis, for whom it was primarily started. Another difficulty presented itself in the tanning of these hides, the choice of process—bark-tanning or chrome-tanning. More than 90 per cent. of the leather sold in the markets is chrome-tanned—the bark-tanned leathers being required only for suitcase-making, for which the demand is not so great.

During the period that the tannery was working—1924 to 1930—a number of Muchis were trained in their own trade. They are all better off now than they had ever been before. But the purely educational side of the tannery did not seem to be justified, and so it was closed in 1931. It was found, however, that it would be profitable for the Institute, as well as for the Muchis, to manufacture fancy articles of leather, such as handbags, embroidered cushion-covers, leather stools (filled with straw), portfolios, etc. So far there has been no difficulty in marketing these articles, and the progress made has been very encouraging to a continuance of this work.

### *Carpentry*

From 1921 to 1928 the carpentry section, although very poorly housed, was under the direction of an expert Japanese carpenter. But during his severe illness, which resulted in his death in 1928, it was closed. Later on another Japanese took charge of the work, but he gave only half of his time to the training of apprentices.

According to the Bengal Census Report of 1901 carpenters were classed with those artisans who are rapidly decreasing in numbers. Although the wooden plough with its little blade of iron is still in vogue, other agricultural machinery, such as the sugarcane-crushing machine, has been replaced by the improved machine made of iron. The conservative village carpenters would not make anything which they had not been making for generations. There is a growing demand, however, for better furniture and fittings even in the village

houses. All these jobs are taken up by the up-country carpenters residing in the towns. If only the village carpenters would take to making new things their trade would be a prosperous one. A number of village carpenters were approached on the subject of sending their boys to the Institute to learn cabinet-making, but they would not avail themselves of the opportunity.

Due to lack of proper housing arrangements and insufficient time at the disposal of the instructor (the Japanese who was also in charge of the vegetable garden) the work of this section did not accomplish much towards the training of apprentices. Since then better accommodation has been secured for this section, and there are enormous possibilities for young men, not only from villages but also from towns, to take up this trade and to earn more than in most of the other professions. There is a great demand for skilled carpenters throughout the entire district, and sometimes it is very difficult to get the services of these people. It is a good chance for the young men of the district to take advantage of the opportunity.

### *Lacquer Industry*

During the time of the East India Company the lacquer industry in the district was in a very flourishing condition. Ilambazar, a small town about nine miles from Sriniketan, was noted for its lacquer-work. As late as fifty years ago there were approximately sixty families in this town engaged in this work. Now only fourteen are left, and these are in a very poor condition. Most of them are suffering from enlargement of the spleen, kala-azar, and other complications accompanying malaria; and if they are not taken care of they will all disappear, one by one. Two of these families have been persuaded to come to work at Sriniketan. Under the guidance and direction of the artists at the Institute they are now turning out articles of real artistic value, attracting the attention of the art-loving public and creating a demand for such things.

*Pottery*

In India the makers of pottery still use old, primitive methods, and the potter's wheel is still a reality. On account of the extreme poverty of the masses the only household utensils for cooking and drinking and eating are earthen pots. Some of the people are so poor that they cannot buy even these earthen pots. The result is that even the potters are not able to support themselves by this trade alone, and often have to seek work elsewhere. No effort has been made to improve this industry, although large quantities of china goods are imported into the country from Japan and Europe. In the whole country there are perhaps not more than half-a-dozen small factories which are producing china wares—or rather modifications of china goods.

In the whole locality there is only one potter, and he too often finds himself out of work. A small plant on modern lines has been set up as an experiment. Nothing can be said about its success yet; but pottery is a craft which can be improved along modern lines.

*Bookbinding, Embroidery and Tailoring*

Art has not yet been commercially utilized as it has been in Europe and America. The old craftsmen are not producing anything new. All their designs are old, and the creative spirit seems to have become deadened. The artists have a great contribution to make to the old arts and crafts of the country. The old arts and crafts of the villages have not only to be revived, but also to be renewed in the light of new experiences and new art. Art is not a static thing. It is living; and Sriniketan is always attempting to improve and introduce the artistic side of village life. The peasant art, however crude, has its place. It is the very soul of the village life. Artistic bookbinding, embroidery and needlework are some of the crafts which can be taken up by village people, not only as hobbies, but also as subsidiary industries.

Tailoring is another trade which has been found to be very profitable in the villages, and yet, there are no tailors to do the work. Coats, shirts, children's and women's garments, ready-made, are sold in towns, and people buy them at the weekly markets. The village people have no idea how much cheaper these articles would be if they were made at home. If only the women knew how to cut out and sew! The widows especially could learn tailoring and could execute orders for their village. In one of the neighbouring villages a widow who had learned a little tailoring at the Institute invested all the money she had in a sewing-machine, and now she is earning a very good living by making garments for only a few families.

There are still a number of cottage industries which can very profitably be introduced in the villages, and the Institute is always on the alert to discover any such industry, along with the right person to direct it.

### *Mechanical Workshop*

Machines of all descriptions are daily making their appearance even in the villages. American Fords and Chevrolet cars and buses can be seen tearing down the country roads, connecting villages not yet reached by railways, and carrying loads of passengers of all castes and creeds. The drivers of these cars and buses, although most of them have never had any training as mechanics, are quite capable of handling these machines. There is a great demand for trained mechanics and electricians to make the petty repairs on these cars. Rice mills are to be found throughout the country districts, and are on the increase. Their machinery also needs repair now and then. Even in the field of agriculture the old hand-made tools and implements are gradually being replaced by machine-made ones. A closer examination would reveal the fact that the machine has invaded even the remotest parts of rural India, but the ability to use and to care for machines has lagged.

Modern science and the machine age have reduced drudgery and sweating to its minimum, even for animals, in Western countries; but the Indian farmer and the artisan are still compelled to spend their maximum physical energy in order to obtain the minimum of results. Even the improved type of simple agricultural implements, such as shovels and pickaxes, are beyond their reach.

In Western countries, with the advent of industrialism and the machine age, the blacksmith readily adjusted himself to the changed conditions. In India, however, although large industries are still in their infancy, machines have reached everywhere, and there is a great need for improved agricultural and other implements, which can be manufactured in India in local shops at a much lower cost than they can be imported.

Through the small mechanical workshop and power-house, therefore, it is planned to manufacture simple and improved agricultural implements, and to give practical training to young men in the making of these implements, and in repair work of all kinds, to meet the growing needs of the villagers.

Electricity and all the blessings which the modern machine age has to give are fast coming into the towns and cities. Electric street-cars, automobiles, electric lights, electric pumps, etc., are being introduced into all the cities. The villages must not lag behind. They too deserve their share of the advantages offered by modern conveniences, and therefore need to learn the use of modern machinery.

#### VILLAGE WELFARE DEPARTMENT

##### *Sanitation and Health*

No programme of rural reconstruction can be complete without including in it the work of sanitation and health.

The unsanitary condition of Indian villages and the diseases from which the people are always suffering cannot escape the notice of even the most casual visitor. People appear to be living in a perpetual state of ill-health, because of the unsanitary

living conditions, malnutrition and ignorance of the elements of personal hygiene.

It is estimated that more than 5,000,000 people in India annually die of preventable diseases, and that the daily death-roll in Bengal caused by malaria alone is 1000. According to the calculations made by Dr Bentley, Director of the Public Health Department, Bengal, there are on an average 28,300,000 cases of malaria infection in Bengal, out of a total population of 46,500,000. Cholera is another disease which appears almost every year in epidemic form and sweeps away millions of people from the country as a whole. These and many other diseases carry away millions of people prematurely to their graves, and prepare millions to follow.

The poverty-stricken condition of the villages is due in large part to these diseases and epidemics. The people have lost their vitality, their working capacity has greatly diminished, and their economic condition has reached the very bottom. It is an acknowledged fact that public health and economic conditions act and react on each other.

. . . Disease causes poverty, and poverty causes disease. More than five million of people suffer the death penalty every year from preventable diseases. Many days of work are lost yearly by each worker from the same cause, and the average efficiency of each worker is diminished by about 20 to 30 per cent. from the combined effects of disease and malnutrition.<sup>1</sup>

What far-reaching effects there will be if the health of the people can be improved it is not possible to estimate. By means of improved health the country will be able to utilize the services of all classes of people much more effectively than it can under existing conditions. There would be a decided increase in the production of wealth. How much larger would be the harvest if the cultivator enjoyed good health! His poor physique and days of illness, especially during the cultivation and harvest periods, prevent his getting

<sup>1</sup> Lt.-Col. F. W. D. Megaw, I.M.S., *Indian Medical Gazette* (quoted by J. N. Gupta in *The Foundations of National Progress*, p. 21).

the maximum return from his land. The economic condition, and with it the whole outlook of the people, can be improved if the living conditions are made more sanitary and if more attention is paid to the promotion of good health.

Perhaps on account of the old idea of solidarity and self-protection, villages in India are very compact, with narrow lanes, and very little space is allowed between the houses. The construction of the dwelling-houses, also, on account of social customs, does not allow for sufficient light and ventilation. Although there is always a courtyard attached to the women's apartments, the women, being busy most of the day in the kitchens, are not able to take advantage of the light and fresh air as much as they should. There is no place set apart for refuse, and each family throws all kinds of refuse and rubbish on the nearest spot. As a result there are heaps of refuse to be found everywhere in the village. The lanes and streets are full of filth. During the rains the lanes are flooded with filth and dirt, the refuse dumps become breeding places of flies, while the pits at the back of the houses become breeding places for mosquitoes. Lt.-Col. Dunn, another authority on public health in India, asserts that "If the laws of health were regarded in India to the same extent as in England, and the same proportion of money was spent on public health, the death-rate in India would be no larger than in England." He goes further, and says that "money spent in training midwives, health visitors and dāis under the supervision of medical officers of health in towns would undoubtedly reduce by half the existing death-rate of infants."<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not the laws of health are followed depends largely on the education of the people. Unless they are given an education which will free them from old superstitious habits they cannot be expected to obey these laws, or even understand them. In order to make them a part of their lives the people must understand what these laws are, and

<sup>1</sup> Lt.-Col. Dunn, I.M.S., "The Economic Value of Preventable Diseases," *Indian Journal of Economics*, January 1924.

why they should be followed. Therefore it is necessary that these people should be educated to the point where they understand the simple rules of health and sanitation.

Experience has proved that when people are shown why they suffer from preventable diseases they become eager to follow such advice, so far as it lies in their power and within their means to do so.

So far as finances are concerned, the District Boards are the only agencies for looking after the health of the rural areas; but, on account of their meagre sources of income, it has not been possible for them to finance an extensive programme of sanitation in the villages. They can hardly support a few dispensaries, which are very poorly equipped. It is necessary for the Provincial and Central governments to participate fully in the sanitary and health programme of the rural areas, although in the long run the success and permanency of the work of sanitation and health will depend entirely upon local initiative and interest. The only way to ensure such a lasting effect is to educate the people, and to organize them into co-operative health societies. The Central Co-operative Anti-Malaria Society, founded by Rai Bahadur Dr Gopal Chandra Chatterjee, under his able and untiring leadership is doing very valuable work. "Co-operation" is the slogan of the present age, and it is in co-operation that the hope of the villages for their health and sanitation lies. The co-operation of the Government and of the District Boards is certainly essential, for without their aid the poor village societies cannot do very much; and yet it is the co-operation of the village people among themselves that is most necessary. It is only when they have learned the full significance of co-operation, and have discarded the old individualistic ideas, that we can hope for a revival of life in the villages. The upper-class people can no longer make such societies exclusive for themselves. No society can be called co-operative, nor can it function satisfactorily, unless and until it extends its membership to all the inhabitants of

the village on an equal footing, and with equal rights and privileges, irrespective of their castes or social status.

The Village Welfare Department of the Institute has under its charge the programme of health and sanitation in the surrounding villages. For this purpose it is equipped with a well-qualified medical staff. There is also a well-equipped dispensary located at the Institute, which takes in out-patients every morning, the afternoons being left for visits to the villages. According to the report of the Institute for 1929, 6760 patients were treated at this dispensary, and their number is on the increase every year.

The same department, with the help of the medical staff, organizes co-operative health societies in the villages within a radius of approximately ten miles, and in some instances at even greater distances. The dispensary is not run on a purely charitable basis. No charge is made for the services of the physician, but the patients are charged the actual cost of the medicines. Those who are members of health societies in their villages get these medicines at a somewhat lower rate, while non-members have to pay the actual cost. In this way people are encouraged to become members of their village co-operative health society. The poor and destitute, however, are given free treatment and free medicines, and in some cases are even provided with food, clothing and shelter. When necessary, the medical staff pays calls. Here again the members are given concessions, while the non-members have to pay the ordinary fee. In all matters pertaining to the question of health and sanitation the medical officer is the supreme authority, and on his advice the department arranges the health programme in the villages. Other workers are sent out to give lantern lectures on malaria and other preventable diseases, and how to combat them. The village Scouts, under the direction of the same department, carry out the programme of anti-malaria work, fire-drills, and checking the spread of epidemics.

The Institute's midwife, who is also a teacher, and good

at sewing and embroidery, not only attends maternity cases, but organizes women's societies in the villages, and gives talks on maternity, nursing and the care of the children. She also invites the local village dāis (midwives) to the maternity cases, and demonstrates the work to them and to other women of the villages.

It will not be possible for a long time for every village to have midwives trained in hospitals and medical colleges, although every village, through its co-operative societies, can send a woman to receive such a training in a recognized institution. Another way to train the village dāis is for each district to have one or two centres where, through the co-operation of the District Boards, the Public Health Department and the co-operative societies, arrangements could be made to offer short courses to these village dāis. They might also be supplied with a small outfit to be used in delivery cases.

There is a great dearth of women doctors in India. The few women that are following the profession of medicine are found mostly in cities and towns. The rural areas are totally neglected. Even male doctors are not easily to be found in the rural districts, and in places where they are available the poor people cannot afford their services. On account of the conservatism of Indian women it is only in extreme cases that they will consent to be treated by a male doctor. This conservatism is gradually dying out, but for the present, in order to do real and effective work, more women doctors, nurses and trained midwives are required for rural work. The male doctor may treat a female patient, he may even do a certain amount of curative work; but for constructive work, which depends upon educating the women in the laws of sanitation and hygiene, the services of women are essential. Once the women have learned these laws, the problems of village sanitation, malaria, epidemics and infant mortality will find their solution.

There are several organizations in nearly every province—

official, semi-official, missionary and national—which are giving training to women in medicine, nursing and midwifery. Among the semi-official organizations the most important are: the Countess of Dufferin Fund, otherwise called the National Association for Supplying Medical Aid to Women of India, founded in 1885; the Victoria Memorial Scholarship Fund, organized in 1902 by Lady Curzon, which aims mainly at training dāis; Lady Chelmsford All India League for Maternity and Child-Welfare, started in 1920, and the most recent Child-Welfare Movement. In addition to these there are numerous missionary, Government and private hospitals, and medical schools and colleges which are equipped for giving professional training to those who may desire it.

So far, the few women who have taken advantage of training at these institutions are from cities and towns exclusively. Hardly any of them go out into the rural areas for service. The village women are not debarred from entering these institutions, but they are much more conservative than their sisters from the cities. Unless, however, they come out and work for their villages, no outside agency can do any lasting and effective work.

A few village midwives have already been trained at the Institute; and with the development of the Medical Section, which is well under way, it is hoped that many more will find opportunity for such training.

### *School Activities*

*Night Schools.*—A number of night schools are maintained, in approximately a dozen villages, for the poor children who are unable to attend the day schools.

Some of these schools are conducted by young volunteers who are interested in social work, while others are directed by the village teachers, who are paid a nominal honorarium for their services.

Besides the three R's, the children are taught simple weaving, carpet- and tape-making, and are urged to take part in all the recreational activities along with the other boys of the village. One of the aims of these night schools is to give to even the poorest child in the village the benefit of an education.

*Girls' School.*—The education of women and girls has been from the very beginning part of the programme of the Institute. There has been a small day school for girls of the neighbouring village. These girls come from all castes, no discrimination being made. Unfortunately, on account of their extreme poverty, the girls of the poorer people have not been able to take advantage of this opportunity. They have to help their parents at home, in one way or another, fetching water from the pond, looking after the cattle or goats, or taking care of the babies while the parents are out at work. There is much yet to be achieved in this direction. The number of girls attending this school, however, is becoming larger and larger, so much so that the present staff cannot cope with the work. The school building was not specially designed for a school. Half of it is occupied as the living-place of one of the teachers, and all the rest of the available space, including the verandah, is used for schoolrooms. There are two teachers, both of them untrained; but, considering the kind of training teachers of primary schools receive in preparation for teaching, they are by no means inferior to the ordinary trained teachers found anywhere in the primary schools in India. These teachers are living in an atmosphere in which all kinds of educational experiments are being carried on. They also receive help from the different departments, including those of art and music. In addition to the three R's, the girls are given instruction in needle-work, embroidery, cooking and gardening. There is also a small flower-garden attached to the school, and every day the girls work in it for about half-an-hour. Outdoor games are greatly enjoyed by these girls, who have very little or no

opportunity at home to get together and play as freely as they do at school. The circulating library at the Institute, used by the people of the surrounding villages, is also open to these girls; they make good use of it, and do a considerable amount of reading outside their school work. They are allowed to carry these books home, where they may share the reading with other members of their families. This school has lately been given over to the Surul Landlords, since most of the girls come from their families. It is hoped, however, that the Institute does not give up the programme of the education of the girls, and will take it up again, when even better facilities may be provided.

### *Rural Circulating Library*

The circulating library, although very small, is the first of its kind in Bengal. It has been mentioned elsewhere how quickly rural children fall back into illiteracy. The chief reason for this is the fact that they do not have access to any books, and most of the people are too poor to buy any. That the rural children are keen to read is shown by the fact that 729 books were issued during the year 1929, and recorded as distributed in fifteen different villages. Branches of this library have been opened in two other villages, which already had small libraries of their own, and with which books are exchanged.

### *Lectures*

Lectures on health and sanitation, co-operation, religious and cultural subjects, and on various other topics, also form a part of the programme of activities of this department. Most of the lecturers are from the Institute itself, although occasionally professors from Santiniketan and experts from outside are invited. According to the report for 1929 twenty-six such lectures were given in nineteen different villages, with a total attendance of nearly 6000, which indicates that

they were greatly appreciated, and also shows the need for such activities in the villages.

### *Training Camps*

Under the auspices of this department the Institute has been holding a series of training camps every year for the following purposes:

1. To train village boys as leaders of Brati-Balakas (Scouts) in their own villages.
2. To give an introductory training to young men from the villages and towns, and to school teachers who may wish to take up some form of welfare or village reconstruction work.

The District Boards, the Co-operative Department of the Government of Bengal, the Co-operative Organization Society (a non-official organization), and many other organizations have been co-operating heartily with this work, and sending delegates to these training camps.

The general programme of these camps includes:

1. Camp Life and Housecraft.
2. Handicrafts and Elementary Agriculture.
3. Scout Organization, including a study of nature in its relation to life.
4. Co-operation, Sanitation and Hygiene, and First Aid.
5. Recreation—Drama, Games, Songs and Story-telling.

The Village Welfare Department also acts as the Extension Department for the Institute, carrying all its activities into the villages, and co-ordinating the work of the different departments, with but one aim—that of rural reconstruction.

### *Brati-Balaka Organization (Scout Movement)*

One of the outstanding features of world movements to-day is the leading part the young are taking in the life of every land. There is perhaps not a single movement of any importance in which the young are not participating. The world

renaissance, in one sense, then, may be called a Youth Movement. This movement is the first of its kind in history. The youth are no longer blind, passive recipients of orders from their elders; no longer are they considered unfit to think for themselves and incapable of taking part in nation-building.

Even in the Orient—where social and religious traditions have been so strong and deep-rooted, where the young have always had their place of submission allotted to them, where all authority has rested with the elders, and where age has always been considered of more importance than any amount of knowledge the young may have acquired—even here the Western influence has brought about a considerable change, and has shaken the very foundations of all the age-long traditions (social and religious). The authority of the elders is no longer blindly followed, and the leadership is gradually passing on to the younger people. The activities of youth in the Orient are directed not only against the domination of the Western nations, they are directed against all the evil customs of their own countries as well. This fight against their own customs and traditions is far more severe than the fight against foreign domination. Unless they come out victorious in this fight—and victory will mean the giving of freedom to millions of their own people who have been kept down for centuries—they cannot expect freedom at the hands of their alien rulers.

*The Baden-Powell Scout Movement in India.*—The Baden-Powell Scout Movement during recent years has spread practically all over India, and almost all schools—especially the Government and Government-aided—have introduced scouting into their programme. In some provinces the Government has appointed a Scout Organizer at public expense. However, the movement has not made such rapid progress as was expected, and has not received the full support and sympathy of the public at large. A critical study of the movement as it is introduced into India might reveal some of the reasons why

it has not received the whole-hearted support of the people, although its aims are so noble and high.

First of all, we find that the Viceroy, the head of the Government in India, is the Chief Scout of India, and the heads of Provinces (Governors) are Chief Scouts in their own areas. This seems to be quite opposed to the fundamental principle that the movement is non-political. As soon as representatives of the Government become official heads of any organization or movement it loses its non-political character. With regard to India, and especially during the years of a strong national and political awakening, this close connection of the officials of the Government has been looked upon with suspicion by the people, and has retarded the progress that the movement might otherwise have made.

The aim of the Baden-Powell Scout Association is to develop good citizenship among boys by helping to form their character—training them in habits of observation, obedience and self-reliance, inculcating loyalty and thoughtfulness for others, and teaching them service useful to the public and handicrafts useful to themselves. It is also anticipated that in the Boy Scout Movement will be found a natural means of bridging the gulf between the different races existing in India—a very noble and desirable aim.

According to the Third Scout Law, which in India runs as follows, "A Scout is loyal to God, King, his parents, teachers, employers, his comrades, his country, and those under him." In this Law the word "loyal" seems rather misleading, at least to the nationalists; and the term has been questioned again and again in Indian politics. Loyalty implies two parties—one who is loyal, and the other to whom this loyalty is due. It is supposed to be reciprocal. In other words, in order to have loyalty the two parties concerned have to do their duty towards each other. This can be well illustrated by an incident which happened in a private school. An English lady, connected with the Girl Guide Movement in Calcutta, went to visit this school with the intention of

organizing a Girl Guide Troop there. She approached a few of the senior girls, and explained to them the aims of the movement. Everything went smoothly, and the girls were quite interested in the idea; but when they came to the question of "Laws and Oaths" there was a hitch. Finally one of the girls, the boldest among them, frankly said that she was prepared to take the oath of loyalty to the King, etc., provided an amendment was made and another clause added to it, which should read: "Provided the King, etc., are loyal to me."

Loyalty to one's country has, of late, come to mean much more to the youths of India than it ever has before. It does not mean any more to an Indian boy or a girl than it means to an English, an American, or a German youth; but unfortunately, in a subject country like India, loyalty, patriotism and love of one's country are not always looked upon with favour by those in authority.

The Fourth Scout Law says that "A Scout is a friend to all and a brother to every other Scout, no matter to what social class the other belongs." It is certainly one of the best laws to help to bring the different races and classes of people in India together. Once these young boys have got over their caste prejudices the dawn of a new social order will not be very far distant. It is the youths who are going to remove the caste and class prejudices which are the chief obstacles to the general progress of the country. But there are people who look beyond the shores of India, and, although confining their vision to the Empire only, find that this brotherhood, as preached in the Scout Law, does not include in it the Scouts from other parts of the Empire. Indian people are not living within the boundaries of India alone. Even within the Empire they are to be found in large numbers in British East Africa, South Africa and the Fiji Islands. But neither they nor their children receive fair treatment in these countries, and so it is rather hard for people in India to believe that this brotherhood as preached by the Scout Movement really exists.

*Brati-Balaka (Scout) Organization at Sriniketan.*—During the first year of the starting of the Institute, Mr Elmhirst, the pioneer and first Director, conceived the idea of introducing scouting among the village boys. He had the insight into human nature to know that effective and lasting work would be done in these villages only if the children could be interested in the welfare of their own communities. Here he struck the keynote to the whole programme of rural reconstruction.

There were, however, no trained leaders to start this work, and so, during the summer of 1921, four of the students from the Institute were sent to a Scout camp in the Central Provinces, where they received a thorough training in the organization of Scout troops. Upon their return from this camp they were expected to organize Scout troops in the neighbouring villages. One of them went to a village with which the Institute had already made some contact and tried to organize a troop there. But the parents of the children suspected that their children were going to be trained in military drill, to be sent to Mesopotamia later on. People had not yet forgotten the Great War, and were not prepared to sacrifice their children for any object which they did not understand. After a couple of days, however, this suspicion and fear disappeared when they saw their children engaged in Scout games and taking a delight in them. The elders became so interested that they even wanted to join these youngsters in their games. The village schoolmaster was quite taken up with the whole idea, and became a strong supporter of the movement in that village. He carried on the work during the week, for the Scout Leader from the Institute could devote only two evenings a week in that village. It was a great asset to have the support of the schoolmaster, for he was not only the teacher, but also the village priest, and thus exercised a great influence with the people.

After two months of regular and systematic work in this village the boys picked up the idea of obedience to order and the value of common action. The group games, in the

same way, developed in them a sporting spirit as well as an understanding of co-operative effort, which was the most vital thing in a village in which the parents of the boys were divided bitterly into two hostile camps. It was through these boys that they were to be reconciled and brought together. But these boys had yet to be tried out as to whether they had really understood and learned the meaning of service.

About this time (Christmas week) there were to be the annual celebrations and a fair at Santiniketan, at which hundreds of people assembled from all over the district. The fair lasted three days. The parents of students at Santiniketan and many visitors had to be accommodated, and their comforts looked after, for which service most of the students of the school were commandeered. More help was required to look after the sanitation and policing of the fair. This was considered to be the most opportune time to give these boys some practical training in the work of public service. Some boys were needed to supervise the parking of the carts, others to see that the drinking water was not wasted, and that the people observed the laws of sanitation and kept good order.

Here was an opportunity to try out these boys in the work of social service. Their village was only three miles from the school, but none of them had ever spent a single night in their lives outside their homes and away from their parents. The parents, who under ordinary conditions would never have allowed their children to remain out at night, had by now sufficient confidence in our Scout Leader, and therefore willingly and gladly allowed their boys to be taken over to this fair to do whatever was demanded of them. Here, again, it was quite a victory over the social customs, which do not allow people of the upper classes to engage in any kind of menial work ; these boys were expected to do any kind of work needed, all of which demanded the use of their hands.

The behaviour of these small boys at the fair was a revelation to everyone. They looked very important at their various posts, and considered it the greatest honour to be

allowed to take part in such a work. They seemed to take a perfect delight in performing their duties, and did not in the least shirk under the strict discipline and obedience to command; nor did they grumble at the discomfort and hard work. They carried themselves with perfect dignity, and enjoyed the fellowship of the other boys at the school, although they belonged to very different classes.

The experiment was so successful that afterwards the Institute undertook similar work (of social service) at all the fairs in the locality, and especially at the one held at Kenduli, a place about eighteen miles from Sriniketan, and the biggest fair in the district. Kenduli is the birthplace of Jaya Deva, the founder of the Vaisnavite sect in Bengal. The fair lasts about five days, and is visited by nearly 50,000 pilgrims, coming from all parts of Bengal, some coming even from outside the province. It is known all over North India. Under the leadership of our Scout Leader, and the Village Welfare Department, every year about thirty to forty Scouts from the Institute and from the neighbouring villages are taken to this fair to look after the sanitation and policing work. After the first year the Chairman of the District Board and the District Magistrate were so well satisfied with the work that they put members of the regular police force under our leadership, while the District Board deputed a physician to work under our direction, and also contributed a certain sum of money towards the expenses. The Mahant (Chief Priest) of the temple also recognized the value of our services, and agreed to provide the whole party with free rations, while from the pilgrims themselves we received nothing but gratitude and admiration.

At these fairs the sanitation problem is one of the greatest importance, and on account of unsanitary conditions epidemics like cholera or plague often break out, resulting in the deaths of thousands of people, and spreading to all parts of the country. The Scouts helped every morning to clean up the whole of the fair area, getting rid of all the refuse that had

collected during the day before; they also prevented the river-bed from being used as latrines, and reserved the cleanest part of the river to be used for drinking purposes. In the evenings lantern lectures were given on the prevention of malaria, cholera and other preventable diseases, also on co-operation and rural reconstruction. In all these activities the Scouts took an active part, and put the lessons of social service to practical use.

*Fighting Fires.*—Nearly all the houses in the villages in West Bengal are built of mud or sun-dried bricks, and roofed with straw thatch. During the summer months fires are quite frequent, sometimes destroying entire villages. Water in the tanks gets very low, but even when water is available the people do not know how to fight these fires. They look on helplessly, not knowing what to do under the circumstances.

It is not possible to stop the occurrence of these fires altogether, but it is possible to fight them fairly successfully if only the village people can be trained to work in co-operation and as an organized body.

The question of organizing such a band was discussed with the people of a village, but it was not until a fire actually broke out in this village, and two houses were completely burned to ashes, that the problem was forced upon the attention of the villagers. While the houses were on fire the people of the neighbouring houses, which had roofs of corrugated sheeting, actually sat watching, and even refused to lend their water-carrying pots for fear lest they might be broken or stolen. It showed clearly how individualism and mutual distrust had completely got hold of these villagers, who at one time could boast of a system of society based on mutual trust and co-operation.

The following night the Scout Leader from the Institute arranged a demonstration by the young boys of the village in fighting fires. The boys had by now learned how to keep discipline and to obey the command of their leader. The rest was not difficult. A thatch which looked like the roof of a house was built upon a tree, and all the boys were sent to their

respective homes. At the alarm whistle they all assembled at a place which was called the village fire station, where a couple of ladders, a few buckets and water-pots were kept. The thatch on the tree was set on fire, and the boys were lined up in two rows up to the nearest tank. One row passed along the empty buckets and pots to the tank, while the other row returned them filled with water. Two or three boys climbed the tree, and within a few minutes they had the fire put out. The whole village turned out to watch the proceedings. It was quite a new thing for them, this organized and co-operative way of fighting a fire. The headman of the village became so enthusiastic over the whole affair that he immediately called for all the adults and asked them to carry out the same plan themselves. They were not so quick as the young Scouts, not having gone through the drill of discipline and order, but they realized the benefit of united action in the control of fires.

Months of lecturing on the subject of forming a fire brigade would have been of little avail. A simple demonstration by the Scouts proved to be most effective. The news soon spread to the neighbouring villages, and they all asked help for similar organizations. Now in every village in which the Institute has extended its activities there is a fire brigade which is rendering valuable service to the villages.

*Other Activities.*—Among other activities of social service by the Brati-Balakas (Scouts) are: collecting data on all the malaria cases in the village, and supplying it to the Medical Officer at the Institute; distributing quinine to those suffering from malaria and enlargement of the spleen; work in connection with the checking of epidemics like cholera; collecting rice and other articles of food and clothing for the poor and needy in their villages; clearing the jungle and filling up the pits of stagnant water; kerosinization of tanks to destroy the mosquito larvæ; making drains in the village to allow the water during the rains to run out; and any other type of service they may be called upon to render at any time.

Under the supervision of the Educational, Agricultural and

Industrial departments of the Institute these Scouts are encouraged and taught how to grow vegetables and flowers. They are also taught how to make simple articles, such as cotton mats, money bags, wicks and tapes. Every once in a while troops of these Scouts are brought by their teachers to the Institute and taken for excursions. While there they are taken round to all the departments of the Institute, and shown the work that is being done in them. Once a year, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Institute, Scouts from all the neighbouring villages meet in a rally, and an exhibition is arranged representing their activities in gardening, hand-crafts, nature study, and in social service. There is also competition in sports, especially in such games as call for intelligent observation, in first-aid, and in the work of the fire brigade. Prizes and awards are given, not on the merit of their physical activities, but on those activities which are conducive to the promotion of better health and the better economic life of their community.

*Results.*—The results of these activities, so far as they have gone, are very encouraging; but considering the amount of energy, time and money that have been spent on this work, the results would have been still greater had all the resources been more systematically and economically utilized. It must be borne in mind, however, that new movements are always looked upon with suspicion, both by the Government and by the people. It is therefore extremely hard for any private organization to achieve anything, because at every step it is confronted with difficulties. The Government has made several attempts to have the organization affiliated with the Baden-Powell Scout Movement. Sriniketan is strictly a non-political institution, and is out for reconstructing the villages in all the different phases. The Brati-Balaka Organization is one of the most important instruments in carrying out this programme. It will not do for this organization to come under official control, for as soon as it does it will lose a lot of the spirit which is behind it.

## CHAPTER V

### THE RURAL EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOL

#### THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING IT, AND THE RESULTS SO FAR ACHIEVED

It might appear rather strange that the problem of rural education was not from the beginning included in the activities of the Institute, for no programme of rural reconstruction can be complete which does not include education among its objectives. Education is, and should be, the foundation upon which the whole structure of reconstruction work is to be built.

For any work to be lasting and permanent the beginning should be made with the children. The laws of sanitation and hygiene, the benefits resulting from co-operation, the evils of the caste system, and the stupidity of some of the religious and social customs, cannot be properly understood by the grown-ups, who for generations have been accustomed to different ways of living and thinking. These problems have to be approached, therefore, through the children. They are still open to the formation of new habits; and all the changes that we want to bring about, and which we want to be lasting, should be brought about through them.

Apart from training the children as Scouts for carrying out effectively the work of rural reconstruction, the education of the village children has to be thought of as one of its principal problems.

The only reason that can be given for the omission of rural education from the educational programme of the Institute is the fact that, except for a few trained craftsmen, the directors of the experiment were themselves untrained. Among these people there was no rural sociologist or economist; but they had plenty of common sense and courage and sympathy, and they had the welfare and interest of the village people nearest to their hearts.

Besides the poet the two people who were most directly responsible for the starting of this experiment in rural education were Mr L. K. Elmhirst, the first Director of the Institute, and Mr Santosh Chandara Mazumdar.<sup>1</sup>

Both received their agricultural training in the United States, but neither of them had any professional training in teaching. Mr Mazumdar, however, had been a very successful teacher at Santiniketan for about sixteen years. He was a leader in all the extra classroom activities. In sports, dramatics, and in making excursions with the boys and girls, he was acknowledged as a leader by the students as well as by his fellow-teachers. Mr Elmhirst discussed the scheme for this school with the poet, who gave his approval, not only with regard to the experiment but also with regard to the person chosen to conduct it—and truly no wiser choice could have been made. Mr Mazumdar was not only a born teacher, he had a real love for children. And although he had never studied psychology, as such, he knew more of it than many a teacher who has had all the courses listed in the catalogue of a teacher-training institution.

Prior to the starting of this experiment the only work the Institute had undertaken in connection with rural education was the establishment of a few night schools in some of the villages, for the poor children who had to help their parents, or go out to work with them during the day, and who therefore could not go to the day schools. At these night schools they were taught mainly the three R's. How much they actually learned it is not possible to say, as there was practically no supervision over the teachers. The children did get some kind of education, however, although not of a literary character, through the activities of the Brati-Balaka Organization, and by means of cottage industries and Home Project Gardens.

As previously mentioned, the whole work of rural reconstruction was in the nature of an adventure, and so it is not

<sup>1</sup> Died in 1926.

surprising that the task of rural education was not included in the curriculum until two years after the starting of the Institute. On the other hand, it was just as well that it was not introduced earlier, for by now sufficient experience had been gained at the Institute to start this new venture without making too many mistakes. It really had behind it the experience of years of educational work at Santiniketan, together with a couple of years of experience at the Institute of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan.

From the brief description of the experiment given in these pages it may be seen that the many years of educational experience at Santiniketan did not prove to be a very valuable asset in this experiment. The students at Santiniketan came from fairly well-to-do families. Most of them were from cities, and expected to live in cities after they had finished their education. They all came from a different environment, and were to go back to more or less the same environment.

I would here venture to say that this educational experiment was undertaken to prove possible what Santiniketan, during all its history of nearly thirty years, had failed to achieve. Since the pupils at Santiniketan were paying for their board and tuition it would not have been possible to make them cook their own meals, wash their clothes, and do the many other things which the children of this village experimental school were going to do. Besides, most of the students at Santiniketan had to pass examinations, while the children of this school were not confronted with this problem at all. "Learning by doing" had been more of a theory at Santiniketan; it was going to be an actuality with these children.

Therefore, it is right to say that the experiment was based upon both the failures and successes of the past. The principles underlying it were not borrowed from any standard works of modern educationists; but, when examined, they seem to be on equal footing with any of the modern educational principles.

In an article written in the *Viswa-Bharati Quarterly*, and later published in a bulletin under the title, *Siksh-Siksha-Satra*, Mr Elmhirst has very ably laid down the principles underlying the experiment. A few extracts from the article will be sufficient to show that the work of the school is based upon modern psychology, and is in keeping with the modern theories and principles of education.

Regarding the aim of the experiment Mr Elmhirst makes the following statement:

Through experience in dealing with the overflowing abundance of child-life, its charm and its simplicity to provide the utmost liberty within its surroundings, that are filled with creative possibilities, with opportunities for the joy of play that is work, the work of exploration; and of work that is play—the reaping of a succession of novel experiences; to give the child that freedom of growth which the young tree demands for its tender shoot, that field for self-expression in which all young life finds both training and happiness.<sup>1</sup>

As compared with these aims, those of the existing village schools, if they may be called aims, differ with the viewpoint of different people. The first and foremost aim among them, although attained by extremely few children, is to find a job outside the village, because the agricultural occupation can never give assurance of a fixed income, however small it may be. Moreover, because of the joint-family system, the land which some families possess is subdivided among members of the succeeding generations to such an extent that there is not enough left to go round. There are others who are of the opinion that by learning the three R's the eyes of the children will be opened to a knowledge of the outside world. This places false emphasis upon literacy; but, after all, how few of the village children acquire even literacy at these village schools?

In the programme of rural reconstruction the aims of a rural school differ somewhat from those given above. The primary aim of a rural school as above all others is to promote the welfare of the children. To this end, making the village

<sup>1</sup> Viswa-Bharati Bulletin No. 9: *A Poet's School*, pp. 24-25.

life more healthy, more productive and more beautiful is found necessary. Whether through this education the children remain in the village, or have to find work elsewhere, is of little importance.

The work of the home school was based upon the needs of the villages. The Home Projects, with all the housecrafts and handicrafts, make up the programme of work and study for the children. Attempts are also being made through this home school, as it might be called, to replace the present educational system as found in the public schools by one which will so build up the countryside that, under normal conditions, no country boy would wish to leave the country for the town. With such aims in view the whole emphasis is laid upon education by experience, rather than upon education by mere teaching. This experience may be of two kinds: (1) experience in earning a livelihood, and (2) experience in the preparation for the fullest possible life as a citizen, within the child's own rural community.

With these aims, as described in the preceding pages, the experiment was started, with only half-a-dozen boys. They were either orphans or their parents were too destitute to send them to any school. No particular method was employed in the selection of these boys. They came from different castes, homes and surroundings—a fact which proved to be of the greatest value from the psychological as well as from the sociological point of view. For a psychologist, these boys provided ample material for the study of “Nature and Nurture,” “Heredity and Environment.”

Of all the countries in the world, India, with its numerous castes and creeds and races, presents the greatest opportunity for research in educational psychology. To prove that caste is no definite indication of the educative capacities of the individuals there is sufficient evidence in the number of people from depressed classes who, by means of education, have risen to some of the highest positions in the various professions. Given an opportunity, and brought up in a suitable

environment, the children of even the lowest castes can succeed in almost any trade or profession.

Although connected with the activities of Sriniketan, the Rural Experimental School, because of the fact that the teacher's home was situated near Santiniketan (one and a half miles from Sriniketan), and in order to provide the atmosphere and influence of a home, had to be located there. Its situation alongside the school at Santiniketan brought, with its numerous advantages, grave dangers also. While full use of the art department (music and painting), of the library, and of several other facilities at the school could be made, and while the children could take part in all the activities of the school—dramatics, music, games and excursions—these boys could not be prevented from noticing the other side of the school life—namely, that pupils at Santiniketan did not have to cook their own food or wash their own clothes, or perform household duties. Thanks to the teacher, however, whenever he noticed that the boys were being impressed by these differences, and were becoming rather dissatisfied with their lot, he immediately interpreted their observations in such a way as to make them proud of being able to perform these tasks themselves, without the help of servants.

Instances of this kind go to prove how important is the position of the teacher in the process of education. The nearest analogy that can be made in the case of the teacher is that of an artist who can produce beautiful objects from the simple material supplied to him. A layman cannot make anything from the same materials. Clay and colours have their potentialities, but these potentialities can be developed only when they pass through the hands of the master potter or the master artist. This, of course, does not mean that the teacher is all in all; it merely means that he holds a very important position in the life of the school. The child's instincts, potentialities and capacities can be directed and developed in the right direction only by a master teacher.

In order to give an idea of the nature of the material (boys)

the teacher had to work with, a brief description of a few of these boys, showing their sociological and physical background, may not be out of place.<sup>1</sup> It will help in the understanding of the problems involved in this experiment—how they were gradually solved, and how the development of these children took place under the new environment.

One boy, aged ten, came from a poor but Brahmin family. He had been living with one of his uncles in his native village, where he had, perhaps, a small share in the ancestral property. He was small for his age, and weighed only 36 lb. He was pale and weak, with no energy for work of any kind. When examined by the doctor he was found to have an enlarged spleen, his liver was out of order, and the malaria from which he was suffering might any day develop into kala azar (a disease much more serious than malaria, requiring a very long and systematic treatment). Caste superiority was very pronounced in him. Although only ten years of age he knew he was a Brahmin, and as such he believed himself to be superior to all the others, some of whom, from his point of view, were untouchables. He was not accustomed to manual work, was extremely selfish, and loved to exaggerate. He did not like to work with his hands, and when he attempted manual work he did it half-heartedly, and with the idea of pleasing the teacher. When working in the common plot of their garden he was always careful to pick out for himself the easiest job, making much ado about it, as if he were doing something very important. He was extremely reluctant to help others in their work, always suspecting lest they, in their turn, might not come to help him. Co-operative life and work were unknown to him. He was constantly comparing his lot with that of the boys in the big school. "They are all reading. Why waste our mornings digging the earth?" he would say. "They do not cook their own food; and if you give us a gardener we shall have all the vegetables we need,

<sup>1</sup> The description of the early stages of this experimental school has been taken from the reports kept by the late Mr S. C. Mazumdar.

and even more." With regard to his meals also he was very orthodox : he would not sit at the table with others who were of lower caste. Through patience and personal example, however, after only three or four months all this changed. By means of proper and systematic treatment his malaria was brought under control, and he began to work with all his might in his garden. He would haul manure from any place he found it, and would dig his little plot of land over and over again. Probably from working a little too hard, although it was entirely voluntary, he had another attack of malaria. While he was lying ill he would often say: "Please, sir, tell the doctor to give me good medicine, so that I may get well and go to my garden to-morrow." When it was suggested to him that a couple of labourers might be employed to work in his garden, as he had wished before, he would say emphatically: "No, no, please; no labourers for *my* garden. These labourers do not love my plants. The other day a labourer was employed in Basu didi's<sup>1</sup> plot. She had worked so hard, and just as the cucumbers had come into flower the fool of a labourer cut the roots with his spade. None of your labourers for me, please!"

By this time housekeeping had become quite easy. In the beginning, cooking and dishwashing used to consume practically the whole day. They managed somehow to snatch only an hour or two for their gardening. Now that they had become a little organized they could do their gardening and housekeeping, and still have nearly half-a-day free. A little weaving was introduced, first with the weaving of cotton mats (durries). The Brahmin boy, however, was not much interested in this. He would say: "What is the use of this? If I had the money I would buy a number of these durries from the market; besides, it is going to interfere with our gardening!" However, after the second or third week, when the drudgery of preparing the yarn was over, and he saw patterns coming out in gay colours, he was delighted. He even began to neglect

<sup>1</sup> Didi is an affix meaning elder sister.

his garden for weaving. "Winter will soon be upon us, and then it will be nice to have durries to spread on our cots," he would say.

In cultural subjects this Brahmin boy took the greatest interest, and soon excelled all the others. He used to take a delight in coaching the youngsters in their reading and writing.

Another boy, aged nine, belonged to the caste of brewers, and as such was rather low in the scale of castes—and he knew it. He showed his inferiority in all his actions. While some of the children would be sitting down on mats he would remain aloof, squatting down on the bare ground. He had no parents, but had three brothers, and possessed quite a decent share in the family property in the shape of lands. He was very sturdy and was never afraid of manual work, but was not so deeply interested in reading and writing. After he had learned to read, however, he would sit sometimes for hours over a book, or would write a humorous account of his excursions. He was a thoroughly unselfish boy, often helping others at the cost of his own work. He developed a taste for woodwork, and served as an apprentice for a short time. The artisan to whom he was apprenticed was no teacher of crafts, but the boy turned out several articles of woodwork of original design that won prizes at the Scouts' Annual Rally. At the annual sports, when four of the boys did not win any prizes, he and another boy, who was also a prizewinner, willingly and without anybody's suggestion, shared with them their trophies. He developed into one of the best boys of the whole lot. Although the youngest in the family, he once took a leading part in settling a very serious dispute which arose among his brothers, who were all far older than he was, with regard to the distribution of the family property. He was even willing to forgo quite a large portion of his share in order to make his brothers come to an agreement. Had it not been for certain ideas learned at this school he too, like his brothers, would have taken the wrong attitude, with the result that they

would have had to resort to law-courts, and would have had to sell all their property to pay the lawyers' fees.

With such material as is described above the experiment was started. The first thing was gardening, and individual plots were laid out. Only an hour or so was given to the study of the three R's, and this had a direct bearing on the work that they were doing in their garden plots. In the evenings, when the boys were engaged in cooking their food, the teacher would often read them the epics of *Mahabharata*.<sup>1</sup> These boys were being introduced to a wonderful world through these stories—a world of great and powerful personalities—and yet so human. The boys chose their favourite heroes; they had their likes and dislikes; they even passed judgment on the different characters. Altogether, they were greatly thrilled, and their whole being seemed to be stirred by the story. They wept and laughed, and sometimes were so absorbed in the story that their food would burn.

There was no time-table hung on a board, nor were any rules and regulations read to them. What was to be done was suggested to them, rarely what was not to be done. As regarded work they did what was considered most suitable at a particular time. One day in the week was given over to an excursion; this was usually in the form of a picnic. The night before these excursions the boys themselves made all the arrangements and collected all the materials that were required. During these excursions they studied the local geography as well as the history of the district. Visits were also arranged from time to time to the local post office, the railway station and the rice mills, and the children were introduced to the work of these institutions. The boys were full of curiosity and asked all kinds of questions. They learned the history of nearly all the villages in the neighbourhood—the causes of their devastation and depopulation. As they

<sup>1</sup> *Mahabharata* is the great Indian epic poem describing the great battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The work was written about 200 years before Homer.

passed through the fields they would notice the different kinds of soils in various places. In one place they would find the land utterly barren and waste; in another place there would be a crop, but a rather poor one, while in others the yield would be beautifully rich. They also observed the irrigation tanks, most of which were in a silted condition and in very poor repair. While noticing all these things they would be told about the once flourishing condition of the villages, and what led to their present condition. They would then offer suggestions of all kinds for the reconstruction of these fast-decaying villages. While on these excursions the boys would collect all kinds of stones and fossils, and under the teacher's guidance they learned a good deal about geology. Later they made a beautiful herbarium and, assisted by their teacher, wrote down a careful and detailed description of the leaves and other herbal specimens that they found. They also studied the medicinal and economic values of the herbs. India is full of medicinal herbs, but, unfortunately, most of the people cannot identify them. An elementary training in the identification of some of the common herbs would be of great benefit to the rural people, who do not always have easy access to hospitals and dispensaries.

During the holidays the excursions were extended into more distant and remote parts of the district, and visits were made to some places of historic interest—ruins of old forts, temples and residences, and factories (now in ruins) of the East India Company. These places were studied from the historical, religious and economic points of view.

From the psychological point of view these excursions were very valuable, in that they helped to bring out the true nature of each boy. On such marches and picnics a boy shows his spontaneous interests, his likes and dislikes, and reveals his real and true nature. In less than six months these boys had learned a good many lessons of self-help, personal hygiene and sanitation. But, above all, they had learned the dignity of labour. The division of labour which led to the establishment

of castes in India has, through the centuries, become so rigid that people following one trade are not supposed to undertake any other, especially if it happens to be one which demands manual labour and involves a certain amount of the so-called dirtying of hands. This system has made life very complex, with one person absolutely dependent on so many others for the necessities of life.

It was a very difficult task to teach these boys the dignity of labour; but they learned it within less than six months, more through personal example than through precepts. The following incident shows how far this success was achieved. It was at the time of the approaching anniversary celebration of the school (Santiniketan). The teachers and students were engaged in a general cleaning-up of the whole school, which covered quite a large area. There were still two more days till the anniversary, when one of the boys went over to the teacher and informed him that they had cleaned their houses, and removed all the dirt from the neighbourhood, and asked him if they could not go over to the big school and give a hand in its cleaning up. The teacher, however, warned them that if they were offering themselves as volunteers their responsibility was by no means a small one, since they might be asked to do any kind of dirty work. The boys accepted the challenge very bravely, and so the teacher suggested to them that they should go with him and help in cleaning up the surroundings of the school latrines, one of the dirtiest spots in the whole area. "What says the Brahmin?" asked the teacher. The Brahmin lad, who only a few months previously would have protested most vehemently against any such suggestion, simply laughed and said: "The smell is horrible indeed, but never mind, the touch of the Brahmin would purify everything! We will do it, only you must allow us to take a plunge into the tank afterwards, since we are no longer afraid of catching colds and getting fevers." Needless to say, within a very short time the job was done.

The next day they were to go for an outing by train and

to have their picnic on the banks of a river. They were eagerly looking forward to this trip, and had made the necessary preparations during the night. In the morning the teacher went to the girls' dormitory to ask the matron if she would allow some of the little girls to go with them on the trip. There he found the matron greatly agitated. She was to look after the lady guests and make all the arrangements for their accommodation. She had applied for some labour for putting up some temporary sheds, but at the eleventh hour she was informed that no labour was available, and that she should do the best she could for her guests. Seeing her in this plight the teacher dared not ask her for what he wanted, but returned quietly to the boys and explained to them the whole situation. For a moment a shadow of gloom and disappointment passed over their bright faces, but only for a moment; the next instant they had forgotten all about their picnic, and willingly offered their services for the job. They went over to the spot and got to work. Some sat down to make plans for the sheds, while others went out to collect the materials (bamboo, straw, string, etc.), and the work was soon started. It took them eight hours to complete the job, but they did it. The matron was greatly relieved of her anxiety, and was delighted with the work the boys had done. The boys too were not only pleased with what they had accomplished, but two of the youngest were so proud that they exclaimed: "These boys of the big school know only to read and to play. We can do anything and everything. We read and play, as well as build houses!" Even Shah Jehan could not have been more proud of his Taj Mahal than these little boys of the thatched shed they had constructed with their own hands.

The villagers in India, and especially of this part of Bengal, having been so much exploited by various agencies, have become very suspicious, not only of outside people but also of each other. These boys, therefore, coming from these villages, brought with them this spirit of mistrust. So far they had their individual plots of garden, and used to haul

manure individually in small baskets, which involved considerable labour and time. There was a pair of wheels of an old wheelbarrow lying about the premises. They were sent over to the carpenter, who fixed them on to an axle and put a box on the top. It was then suggested to the boys that they could work in groups, and thus save both time and labour. Again the Brahmin boy took the lead in the protest, and said: "It is no advantage. Why should I waste my time filling up the cart for others? I know what they will do: once they have got their own plots manured they will not care to help me." They all had more or less the same opinion of each other. The matter was dropped for the time being. The next day was market-day, and the boys with their teacher had to go to make their weekly purchases. While there they witnessed a quarrel between a villager and an up-country man. The latter, being physically much stronger, slapped the poor villager, who was too weak to retaliate or even defend himself. He shouted for help. Immediately a number of his fellow-villagers rushed to the scene, and were going to thrash the up-country man when, through the intervention of the teacher, who knew some of the villagers, they were persuaded to let the man go; and so the matter ended.

On their way back the boys were full of the incident. They kept repeating "Unity is Power." "Bharat-varsha (India) has been in this pitiable condition because we have no unity." Some, remembering the stories that had been read to them, remarked: "Even straw, when united, makes a rope that can bind even the king of elephants." The meaning of co-operation could not have been taught in a better way than by this simple incident. They learned the meaning of co-operation by actual experience.

As a result, the next day a large plot of land was measured and laid out. It was going to be their common plot, to be worked by all of them conjointly and on a co-operative basis. The boys dug and raked; they hauled manure in the small cart without a single word of protest. All their suspicions

and mistrust disappeared as if they had never existed in their minds. Every now and then the boys would rush to the teacher and tell him how much more they could accomplish since they were all working together. This, too, was a discovery they had made themselves, and which they were eager to report to the teacher. "Combined or Group work" became their motto from henceforth in everything they did—in weaving (especially in the preparation of yarn), in watering the plants, etc.

While they were doing the work in their garden plots and in the weaving workshops, as well as looking after their household duties, the cultural side of their education was by no means neglected.

One day some of the boys went to the teacher greatly excited. One of the boys had written his first letter, and was very proud of it. Two others accompanied him to the post office. There they saw the postmaster writing in English, on the letters addressed in Bengali, the names of the post offices to which they were addressed. They asked the teacher why he was doing so. When he explained the reason they all exclaimed with one voice: "We must learn English also." They had their whole day already filled with other activities, but they were quite keen to have English added, and did not consider it a burden. They were so eager to learn English that it had to be started almost immediately. The teaching of the literary subjects so far had been kept in the background, but now these boys, as they felt their need, brought it out into the foreground with great zeal. Sometimes they would sit up until nine o'clock at night writing an account of their work, or getting three or four pages of handwriting done, when only half a page would have satisfied the teacher.

With regard to appreciation of art, through the personality and influence of the principal of the Art Department—one of the best modern Indian painters, and an artist in the fullest sense of the term—these boys were introduced to the beauties of nature. Whenever they went to him he would put aside

his own work in order to give them a hint here and an encouragement there in their little works of art. They would bring colours from the Art Department, and during their leisure hours would draw and paint all kinds of things. Some of the girl students in the Art Department also took a great deal of interest in these boys, and would often go to visit them in their own home. Seeing some of the walls of the Art Department covered with fresco-painting, the boys desired to have the walls of their mud house decorated with some designs. One of the lady artists, with several of the girl students, went over and painted their walls with beautiful and decorative designs.

The appreciation of art has not yet totally disappeared from the Indian villages. In the semi-modern houses, however, one does not see any of the decorations that one could see in the old houses. Villages which have not been touched by foreign influence have most of their houses painted inside as well as outside with artistic designs. Even on the mud floor the womenfolk make some kind of symbolic designs every morning before worship.

Living in such an environment, and with all the opportunities that any progressive educational institution could offer, at the end of two years these children were found to be completely changed. Suffering from malaria and its effects, they had come broken in health. They had brought with them caste distinctions—the Brahmin with his superciliousness, and the non-Brahmins with their shrinking habits and inferiority complex—always suspicious of one another, and hating to do anything for the common good lest others besides themselves should get the least advantage. They sulked even in doing things which were for their own benefit, for, according to their ideas, those things should have been done by an ordinary coolie or by a paid cook. They were not ashamed of living upon charity, but were ashamed of self-help; it was quite foreign to them. These characteristics, believed by some people to be inherent, were all removed

and cleared away, and in their place there grew an active, healthy life and a spirit of sacrifice, service and comradeship. Instead of idly grumbling over slight deficiencies, and expecting everything to be done for them, they learned the lesson of self-help, and took a real delight in cooking their meals, in the care of their home, in raising their own vegetables, and in making their own clothes. They felt proud that they could do these things for themselves, and were sorry for the children of their own age in the other school, because they had most of these things done for them.

After the death of Mr Mazumdar, in 1926, the school was removed to Sriniketan. The experiment had proved successful in more than one way, and it was considered desirable to take in more boys from the villages and give them an opportunity for similar education, at the same time evolving a system of rural education which could be introduced into all the village schools. The number of boys was increased to thirty, half of them to stay as boarders, as there was not accommodation for more, the rest to come as day scholars. From now on they were also expected to pay at least part of their expenses, particularly board. Most of these village boys come from very poor families, and cannot afford to pay the full cost of board, so every boy is treated according to individual merit. They all have to contribute something, however, toward their maintenance. With a little financial assistance from the Institute even the day scholars, who bring their own share of rice and pulses, may enjoy a nourishing midday meal.

Of the original group of six, one is working as a carpenter and laboratory assistant at the Institute; another (the Brahmin) learned tailoring, and has set up his shop in Bolpur; others have gone to their respective villages, and are earning their living by means of weaving, agriculture and other allied industries. They all stayed at Sriniketan for quite a while, even after the expansion of the experiment, and were found to be of great help in initiating the newcomers into the ideas of the school. New teachers had to be appointed, but the

principles and methods of teaching are the same. The experiment, or "Siksha-Satra," as it is called, is one of the most potent factors in the programme of the Institute; and in their studies, garden work, arts and crafts these little boys often put to shame the senior apprentices who come to us much more matured and with habits already formed.

Through this experiment, then, a serious attempt is being made to fit the village boys for an independent and better mode of living, and to make them useful and worthy citizens of their small villages, and at the same time to give them a cultural education, thus creating in their minds an appreciation of beautiful things. An effort is also being made to stimulate a desire to live in clean and healthy surroundings, and to inculcate in their young minds the idea of service.

It is only when the children of the rural areas begin to receive an education which will enable them to enjoy cultural and recreational advantages of town or city life, and thus induce them to stick to the countryside, that the village life of India will once more blossom forth. Through such a system of education the people will learn the value of sanitation and hygiene, the evils of the caste system and superstitious ideas about religion will disappear, the farmers will become better farmers, co-operation will take the place of mistrust, and the exploitation of the ignorant and the illiterate will cease.

The agricultural problem has many aspects, of which education, though not the least important, has received the least attention. The necessity for better farming has long been recognized. It was brought home to the nation with great emphasis during the War. But the work of the Ministry of Agriculture, the County Agricultural Committees, the universities and agricultural colleges will come to little unless it is accompanied by a higher standard of education, and by the provision of social attractions in the villages, which will prevent the drift of the most intelligent men to the towns. It must not be forgotten that agriculture, if the least articulate, is yet our largest industry, on which in the last resort the security of the nation depends. In this as in other matters the education of the nation is its surest defence.<sup>1</sup>

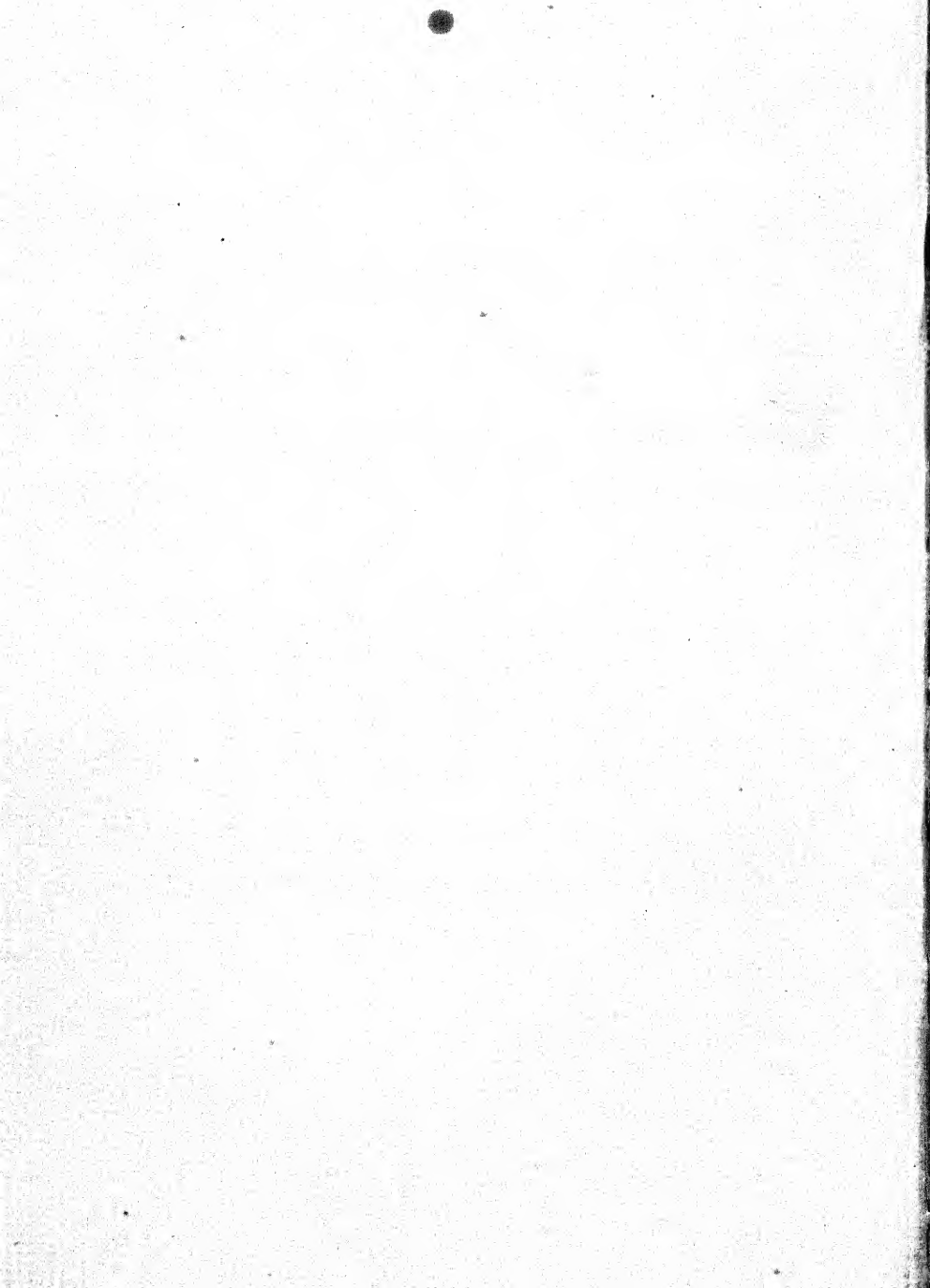
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<sup>1</sup> Section 3 of the pamphlet of the Board of Education (England) on *The Development of Adult Education in Rural Areas*.

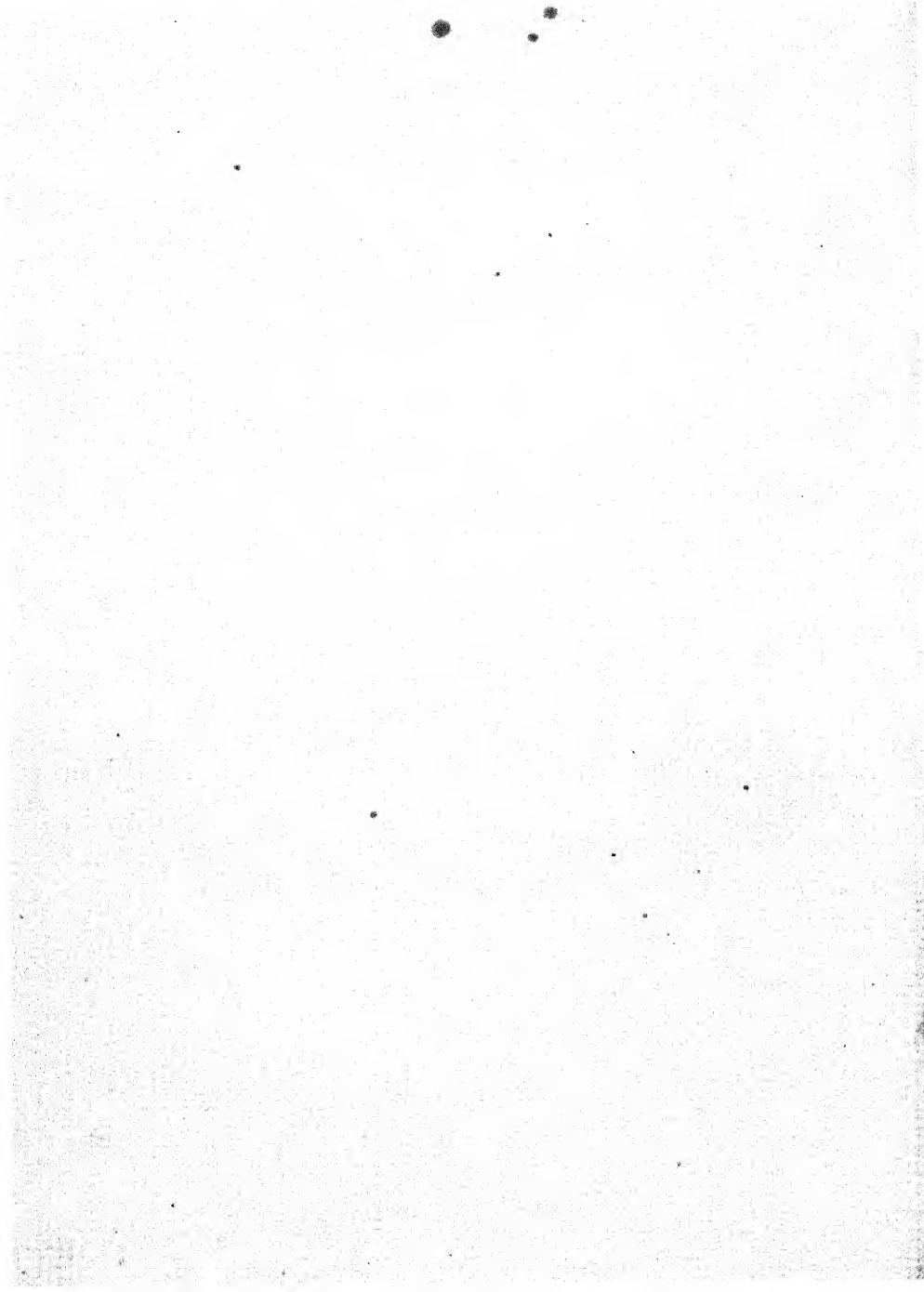
The above has been said about England, which is primarily an industrial country. How much more does it apply to India, where over 85 per cent. of the total population lives in villages, and where agriculture is the main occupation. There is a wealth of meaning behind the words of the late Sir Horace Plunkett, father of the Co-operative Movement in Ireland: "Better Farming, Better Business, Better Living." To these may be added "Better Education," which would help to take care of the other three.

Education in India has to be built upon Indian thought, Indian history, Indian tradition and Indian literature; and, for the rural people, upon the rural environment. At the same time it should make full use of science and the scientific methods in teaching which the West has to offer to us.

Of all experiments, the experiment in the field of education is the most important, for in it we are dealing with human beings, with personalities, with living souls. Therefore the services of psychologists and philosophers are required, but more than that, good teachers are needed—men and women trained in the theories and practices of teaching. To accomplish all this we need experimenters who, with faith and courage, will launch out boldly and courageously upon the work to be done, and who by their sheer honesty and sincerity will ultimately win the support of the public and of the Government. These teachers will have rendered, in so doing, the greatest service to the country and to the human race through the best medium, education.



## PART II



## CHAPTER VI

### EVALUATION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF VISWA-BHARATI AND OF THE INSTITUTE OF RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

EVALUATION of the activities of Viswa-Bharati and of the school at Santiniketan may be made from the point of view of the following criteria:

1. As to the need for the founding of these institutions.
2. Programme of work at these institutions, and whether it is according to modern educational principles and theories.
3. Support of these institutions by the public.

Leaving Sriniketan, the Institute of Rural Reconstruction, aside for the present—for it, too, is a part of Viswa-Bharati—the activities of Viswa-Bharati may be divided into two sections:

1. Those of the school at Santiniketan, in which a liberal education in elementary, high school and college departments is given to boys and girls of well-to-do families, and where, in addition to the curriculum prescribed by the Calcutta University (for the students do appear for the Calcutta University examinations), the school of art, dramatics, music, the environment of the Ashram, and the numerous extra-curricular activities constitute an important part of the students' education.

2. Those of Viswa-Bharati, which is really a development of the school (Santiniketan), and through which Tagore seeks to bring about a better understanding between the East and the West by means of a study of their cultures.

*Need for the Founding of Santiniketan and Viswa-Bharati.*—Santiniketan may be described as one of the progressive schools in India. There being so few such schools, and because of the guiding spirit of Tagore behind it, it occupies a very important place among the progressive schools.

The circumstances leading to the founding of this school

by Tagore are described elsewhere in this study. Here it is sufficient to say that the sensitive mind of the poet must have felt the need for such an institution very keenly. He must have felt real sympathy with the boys and girls who had to go through the rigid and disciplinarian system of education. The idea underlying this institution, in Tagore's own words, is that:

. . . it is not like a fixed foundation upon which a building is erected. It is more like a seed which cannot be separated and pointed out directly it begins to grow into a plant. . . . And I know what it was to which this school owes its origin. It was not any new theory of education, but the memory of my school days.<sup>1</sup>

It is with such an idea in his mind, then, that Tagore started his school. The programme of work carried on at the school has been described fully in a previous chapter. The principles underlying the working of the various school activities have also been mentioned before. Only some aspects of the school which did not receive adequate treatment may be mentioned here. They are the simplicity of the whole place—simple living on the part of both the students and the teachers, the absence of classrooms and the barrenness of furniture; these are there, not because of poverty, but “because they lead to personal experience of the world.” The school is in the open country, far from the turmoil of cities and towns, amidst groves of trees. With the presence of the teachers and their families it gives the picture of one large family, and helps in the natural development of the children. Boys and girls study together in happy relationship with one another. Mr Badley, founder and headmaster of Bedales School, in England, and a great advocate of co-education, says: “The finest teaching is the influence of personality upon personality. To confine this influence to the same sex is semi-starvation.”

The numerous extra-curricular activities, most of which are not only ignored but repressed in the existing educational system, but which are considered to be of great importance

<sup>1</sup> Tagore, *Personality*, pp. 111-112.

in the education of children, should evaluate fairly high according to modern principles of education.

The introduction of industrial arts in the curriculum of the school not only gives the students a knowledge of the things they use in their everyday life, and a certain amount of skill in making them, but also teaches them appreciation, and helps them to co-ordinate the functions of the hands and of the head. While building a house, which is now being used as their workshop, the children of the elementary school learned many a lesson of life. They learned by "doing."

In the West, Tagore is recognized not only as a poet and one of the foremost thinkers, but also as one of the most outstanding educators of the present age. This not because of any of the books on the philosophy of education that he has written—although one can find some of the most modern theories of education in some of his writings—but because of the school which he has founded, and because of the principles of education which he is trying to work out and which are recognized by all the leading educators.

Professor William H. Kilpatrick, of Columbia University, who visited the school, has spoken of the active life, particularly of the elementary school, with appreciation; while Professor Mindlay has ranked Tagore with John Dewey as an educator.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the founding of Viswa-Bharati, and evaluating the programme of its activities, it is not possible to measure them according to any set standards. A clear conception of this institution can be had from the words of Professor Sten Konow.<sup>2</sup>

The response which the poet received from some of the internationally known scholars of the West is an indication that the idea behind Viswa-Bharati is not merely Utopian, but something which could be realized. (The names of some of these scholars may be seen on p. 44.)

The success or failure of such an institution may also be judged from the support and sympathy it gets from the public,

<sup>1</sup> Tagore, *Personality*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

and the recognition it receives from other educational institutions. There was a time when the Government offered a grant for the school at Santiniketan. These grants are usually accompanied by Government inspections and a type of interference which would not allow for much freedom, so that, so far as the school at Santiniketan is concerned, Tagore has not accepted any assistance from the Government.

The receiving or non-receiving of financial support from the Government or from the public is not always an indication of the soundness of an institution. And yet one may argue that, in a large country like India, surely if Tagore's school is so progressive and advanced, at least there would be many more students than are now in attendance. In explanation of this apparently inadequate popular support two reasons may be advanced:

1. That in the existing system of education in India examinations and certificates are given the greatest consideration. Progressive schools have, therefore, to pay the penalty for their failure to attach so much importance to examinations. Most parents have only one ambition with regard to their children's education—that of passing the examinations, and those too, as far as possible, from Government institutions or from others recognized by the Government. Tagore, in disregarding official recognition of his school, is too far ahead of the times for India to appreciate his aims and to understand his ideas.

2. The second reason for Tagore not receiving adequate support from the public is because of the non-sectarian character of his institutions. Here again he is a pioneer, and far ahead of the times. Nearly every private institution in India is affiliated with some religious organization. Two outstanding examples are the Benares Hindu University and the Aligarh Moslem University, both of which receive the fullest possible support from the followers of their respective faiths. Tagore's University, if we may so call it, is unique in that it is not only non-sectarian, but also international, as its very name, Viswa-

Bharati, implies. This universal character of Viswa-Bharati is further explained by a few extracts quoted from the Memorandum of Association of Viswa-Bharati. The objectives are listed as follows:

To bring into more intimate relation with one another, through patient study and research, the different cultures of the East on the basis of their underlying unity.

To approach the West from the standpoint of such a unity of life and thought of Asia.

To seek to realize in a common fellowship of study the meeting of the East and the West, and thus ultimately to strengthen the fundamental conditions of world peace through the establishment of free communication of ideas between the two hemispheres.

And with such ideals in view to provide at Santiniketan aforesaid a centre of culture where research into and study of the religion, literature, history, science and art of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Islamic, Sikh, Christian and other civilizations may be pursued along with the culture of the West, with that simplicity in externals which is necessary for true spiritual realization, in amity, good-fellowship and co-operation between the thinkers and scholars of both Eastern and Western countries, free from all antagonisms of race, nationality, creed or caste, and in the name of the One Supreme Being, who is Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam.

With regard to the membership of the Viswa-Bharati the Memorandum says that:

The membership of the Viswa-Bharati and of its Constituent Bodies shall be open to all persons, irrespective of sex, nationality, race, creed, caste or class, and no test or condition shall be imposed as to religious belief or profession in admitting or appointing members, students, teachers, workers, or in any other connection whatsoever.

Such ideas may not find sympathy with the general public, even in some of the more progressive Western countries. It is no wonder, then, that for the great majority of the people of India such ideas and ideals are too advanced to be understood, at least in this generation; and yet it cannot be denied that Viswa-Bharati and the educational institutions at Santiniketan have a contribution to make to the progressive educational movement in India. In no age and in no country have pioneers and prophets had an easy path to travel. In his educational experiment Tagore is fighting against the traditional system

of education. He has already won the admiration and recognition of the leading educators of the West, and time alone will bring public recognition of the value of his school and of Viswa-Bharati, and of the contribution they have to make in the reform of the educational system of India.

#### SRINIKETAN

Sriniketan, the Institute of Rural Reconstruction, was needed to complete the educational programme. Studies of poetry, philosophy, literature, art, religion, history and science have their place in education, but they cannot be carried on in the midst of semi-starved, malaria-stricken people, who live in poverty and despair. The care of these people had to be included in the scheme of education. In order to help them to enjoy health and physical well-being villages had to be reconstructed, and the old civilization had to be revived in the light of the new.

The most crying need of Bengal to-day is that of rural reconstruction. It is also the need of many other parts of India. Even the Government has awakened to a realization of this fact, and in some provinces has started some kind of reconstruction work. There are also numerous private organizations engaged in this work throughout the country. Sriniketan is one of these organizations, but its activities are much more comprehensive than those of any other organization, official or non-official, at least in Bengal.

The problems of rural reconstruction are manifold and closely related, one arising from the other; therefore they have to be attacked together. In trying to solve the health problems one runs into the economic problems; and in trying to solve the economic problems one becomes involved in educational problems. Social and religious problems arise in every situation. All these problems are so closely related that it is not possible to deal with them separately and in isolation.

Mistakes have undoubtedly been made both in the organiza-

tion and in the administration of the Institute, but the entire work has been a kind of experiment undertaken by people who were pioneers and adventurers. Whenever mistakes have been discovered or pointed out by experts an attempt has been made to correct them immediately. In this way the Institute has had a natural growth. For instance, the Institute was first named "Department of Agriculture and Rural Economics," and a regular two-year course in agriculture and rural economics was carefully planned, after the pattern of a two-year course in an agricultural college. The successful candidates, on the completion of their course, were to receive diplomas. Later this was found to be against all the principles of the Institute, and even of progressive education. The name of the Institute appeared also to conflict with the name of the Government Department of Agriculture. It was too high-sounding, and was liable to give people the impression that it was an agricultural college equipped to teach up to the degree standard. Before very long both the name and the system of certification were abolished. The certification system has been the bane of the present system of education. Already there are many young men with the best of certificates seeking jobs and finding none. The aim of Sriniketan was not to add to the list of job-seekers, but to prepare its students and apprentices to earn their livelihood by means of some art or craft learned at the Institute, and to equip them for initiating welfare and reconstruction work in their villages.

#### EVALUATION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE INSTITUTE

An analysis of the activities of the many departments at the Institute will show that each of these departments has one or more of the following four aspects—research, commercial, educational and extension. In the light of one or more of these aspects we can examine each of these activities. It is only with respect to these outcomes that the success of these Institute activities can be expressed.

*Agriculture.*—The inclusion of agriculture in the programme of rural reconstruction cannot be challenged. Being the main occupation of the rural people it has naturally been given first place. The only way people can improve their condition is by following scientific and improved methods of farming, by adopting improved types of implements, and by organization of markets and credit. Although there are many agricultural colleges, research institutes and Government demonstration farms, the great mass of farmers still follow the old primitive ways.

The poor yield of Indian crops is due to a variety of causes, some of them unavoidable, others within human control. The unavoidable causes may be natural, such as rainfall and its uncertainty, and crop pests. There are other unavoidable causes although within human control, but not as matters stand to-day. These causes are—the small holdings and the tenancy system. Causes which can be brought under control may be listed as: old and conservative habits and tillage, and ignorance of improved and scientific methods; the illiteracy of the peasants; their poverty and inability to purchase improved implements, better draught cattle, better seeds and fertilizers; and want of an Agricultural Extension Service.

This is the situation that the agricultural section of the Institute has set out to meet. How these problems have been attacked may be explained in terms of the four aspects stated above.

The best way to help the farmers who are illiterate is by actually showing to them improved and scientific farming operations. In doing this there was involved a certain amount of experimentation and research, particularly in the introduction of green-manuring crops, which considerably increased the yield per acre. Experiments have also been carried out with success in regard to the introduction of improved types of sugar-cane and other crops not usually grown in this locality. In places where there are irrigation facilities to be had a certain amount of potatoes are grown. The price of potatoes at

harvest is very low, but the farmers did not have any means of storing them. The agricultural section devised a new method of storing potatoes, and one which was within the reach of every farmer. Instances of these kinds go to show that so far the research work on the farm has concerned itself with practical problems. The farm cannot be said to have been commercially successful as yet, although it is the aim of the Institute to make every productive department pay. This is due to the fact that the agricultural section is still in the experimental stage, and the development of its commercial aspect must await the results of experimentation.

In its educational aspect the section has trained a number of apprentices and teachers from the neighbouring schools, who, as a result of their training, have introduced gardening into their schools. The apprentices have been given practical training in all the farming operations, so that they may be independent farmers. The criterion of their training has always been their ability successfully and profitably to manage the plots of land allotted to them, and not so much their academic knowledge about scientific and improved methods of farming.

*Industries.*—The need for the inclusion of industries (cottage industries) in the programme of rural reconstruction cannot be over-emphasized. Rice is about the only crop that can be raised on most of the land, and if it fails the farmers have to go without even the meagre output they would get from this crop. "Ploughing, sowing, transplanting, weeding, reaping and threshing can engage a cultivator on an outside estimate not more than ninety days of eight hours in the year."<sup>1</sup>

Rae Bahadur Bijay Bihari Mukherji, of the Bengal Civil Service, rightly says, then, that: "No scheme for national resurrection will be complete which does not permit a place—a high, honourable, dignified and permanent place—to the cottage industries of the country."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Final Report of Midnapore Settlement Operations*, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> Bijay Bihari Mukherji, *The Cottage Industries of Bengal*, p. 2.

Another authority, Sir M. Visvesvaraya, says:

Under present conditions in India, agriculture gives a bare living, sometimes less than a living, to those who pursue that calling. Without industry and trade in addition, however, it is impossible for India or any other country to keep money in circulation or credit easy, and to maintain even an average level of prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

The only way, then, to meet this situation is by means of introducing cottage industries.

As with agriculture, the section dealing with industries also has four aspects—research, commercial, educational and extension.

Research in indigenous dyes and in new patterns is carried on as much as time permits, and the results are tried out at the Institute before taking them to the weavers or teaching the apprentices. Commercially, this section has quite justified its existence, and, allowing for the time the instructors spend in the educational and extension work, it has been found to be one of the best paying sections. According to the report of the Institute for the year 1929, in the weaving section alone 214 students of various description—from weavers to school teachers—had received their training. The weavers, by improving their designs, by working on improved looms, and through the co-operative marketing and purchasing of their products, have increased their income considerably; and several who were not weavers by caste, but who took to this trade, are making a much better living than they would otherwise have done.

It has, however, never been the aim of the Institute to compete with factories. Large industries certainly have their place, and the country cannot make any material progress without them. While they bring prosperity to a country they also bring with them many other problems, and the people of India have to learn from the mistakes other industrial countries have made before they introduce these big industries. For enriching the life of rural India, economically,

<sup>1</sup> Sir M. Visvesvaraya, *Reconstructing India*, pp. 153-154.

culturally and socially, cottage industries have a very great contribution to make. So long as the agricultural population has time but no money to spend, many of their needs must be supplied by cottage industries which, if agriculture were more prosperous, would be supplied by factory-made products. The civilization most desirable for India, then, is the one which will arise out of improved agriculture and cottage industries.

### *Village Welfare Department*

The work of this department has been fully described in Chapter III. To some extent it corresponds to that of extension work in America, but its activities are much more comprehensive than those of the Extension Department. This department is a connecting link between the Institute and the villages, and between the different departments of the Institute itself. It also undertakes a social and economic survey of the locality in which it works, thereby making possible a scientific and comprehensive approach to the solving of the problems there encountered. In most parts of the world, wherever village communities are homogeneous, religious beliefs make no great difference in the relationships of the people. When there are differences they form no barriers to social intercourse or to welfare service. In India, on the other hand, almost every village presents a different problem in the matter of religion. One village may be purely Hindu, with nearly all the castes represented in it; another may be purely Mohammedan; another may be a Hindu village, with the Brahmins predominating. In this way we can find all kinds of variations, and accordingly different problems have to be attacked in different ways. These rural surveys, therefore, are very necessary to carry out the work in a systematic and scientific manner.

*Co-operative Agencies.* — The Institute has recognized co-operation as the keynote of village welfare in rural reconstruction; no programme of work can be effective without

it. Co-operative Credit Societies are freeing the village people from centuries of indebtedness; Co-operative Health Societies are helping to rid the villages of malaria and other diseases which have swept away millions of people. It is co-operation which is bringing the people of different castes and creeds together in the common cause of rebuilding the village life.

The Co-operative Department of the Government of Bengal, recognizing the ability and honesty of purpose of the workers at Sriniketan, has established a Central Co-operative Bank at the Institute, under the managership of members of the Sriniketan staff. More than seven hundred Credit Societies are affiliated with the Bank, and are deriving benefit from it. The progress has been marvellous; and it is hoped that within a few years the indebtedness of the people will have been removed, thus enabling them to lay by something and to have a banking account of their own.

*Scout Organization.*—This has been fully discussed in the section on Brati-Balaka Organization. The introduction of Scout activities is not only justifiable, but is essential in the programme of rural reconstruction and rural education. Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scout Movement, and all the leaders of the youth movements have recognized the educative values of these organizations. The educative values are also recognized by leading educators the world over. The idea of service that the young boys of the villages have got from joining the Brati-Balaka troops is already bearing fruit. Whatever the nature of service may be—from the extinguishing of village fires to the collecting of refuse, and even the collecting and burning of soiled bedclothes in cases of cholera epidemics—nothing is considered contaminating or polluting by these young boys.

*Medical Section.*—Proper evaluation of the activities of the Medical Section cannot be made from the number of patients who have been treated and the amount of medicine doled out. Charitable institutions have their place, but their usefulness

is limited. The real value of the work must be judged from the extent to which preventive measures and self-help have been successfully introduced in the villages. This the Medical Section has been able to achieve to a remarkable degree by organizing the Village Health Societies. In the village of Ballabpur systematic and intensive work has been carried on. The following figures show the decrease in the number of malaria cases there<sup>1</sup>:

In 1925	.	.	.	85 per cent.
In 1926	.	.	.	52 „
In 1927	.	.	.	18 „
In 1928	.	.	.	17.3 „
In 1929	.	.	.	33 „

This rise in 1929 was due to the fact that in previous years, there being so few cases of malaria, the people became careless and did not take sufficient precaution. In all the villages in which Health Societies have been formed the sanitation and health of the people have improved. These results could not have been achieved through charitable means alone.

The Medical Section might have given more attention to work among the women. This, however, could not be done, on account of the inadequate staff. There has been only one woman worker, and she has been able to give only part of her time to the work among the village women. It is very necessary that more women be added to the staff and that more attention be given to the work of training village dāis and organizing women's societies. Only when the women are trained in sanitation and hygiene, in child-welfare and maternity, will the health of the villagers really improve.

The best criterion of the work of this department, and in fact of the whole Institute, lies in the reputation it has earned and the confidence it has gained among the village people, who, in the beginning, were suspicious of every person at the Institute, and of everything that the Institute wished to

<sup>1</sup> *Viswa-Bharati, Annual Report and Audited Accounts for 1929, p. 27.*

introduce into the villages. Confidence has been gained by the real worth of the programme of rural reconstruction and by the sincerity and honesty of workers. Confidence is the secret of all success in the work of this nature. So many organizations fail in their mission, however noble and just their cause may be, because they never get close to the village people. Leaders and workers in these organizations assume an air of superiority with the village people, and the simple village folk are afraid to go near them. They may nod their heads in agreement with everything that the workers say, but that is as far as they will go. Unless the welfare workers place themselves on a level with these simple village people, unless they sit down and discuss with them their problems in their humble cottages and accept their simple but genuine hospitality, they cannot expect to lift them up to a higher level.

Speaking about the work of the Institute at Ballabpur, Mr C. G. Stevens, the Magistrate and Collector of the district, wrote on the 11th February 1929<sup>1</sup>:

It has already become a model village; but the reproduction in other parts of this district will not be possible unless a corresponding amount of sympathy and co-operation is to be obtained from the educated classes of these places.

The activities of the Society (Co-operative) are numerous: the villagers have caught the right spirit, and their subsequent progress should be automatic.

The Society can count on my close interest and moral support if it continues as it has started; many people will be sent here to see it working.

With regard to the medical work Dr S. N. Sur, Assistant Director of Public Health, Malaria Research, Bengal, wrote on the 27th July 1929:

As to the effect of the anti-malarial measures, there is no doubt about it. The villagers themselves admit that in the years before the introduction of these measures they suffered from much malaria, whereas last year they had very little, and this year up to date there has been no fever.

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<sup>1</sup> *Viswa-Bharati, Annual Report and Audited Accounts for 1929*, p. 31.

The publicity officer of the Public Health Department inspected the village on 15th November 1929, and wrote:

The reduction in the Spleen Index figure tells for itself of the anti-malarial measures adopted by the society. . . . Of the many anti-malarial societies that I have inspected this is perhaps one of the best, and is doing splendid work.

Testimonials from other officials and non-officials who have visited the Institute from time to time may be added, but the few which have been cited go to prove that not only the activities of the Village Welfare Department, but those of other departments as well, are meeting a real need of the people, and have brought about an appreciable change in the life of the villages in which they have been extended.

### *Vocational Education*

In evaluating the activities of Vocational Education, as it is given in the different branches of agriculture and industries, we may consider the following points:

1. Whether there is any need for such a training.
2. How far this training has been along the lines of modern education.
3. Results so far achieved.

1. Since the great majority of both the rural and the urban population maintains itself by means of some trade or occupation, and since vocational education of a scientific character can no more satisfactorily be given under the old apprenticeship system, and since signs of social and material changes are to be seen even in the rural districts of the country, resulting not only in the need for better training in the existing trades and occupations, but in the introduction of new ones, it is obvious that vocational education should be given greater importance than the ordinary academic education.

Of those who go to school very few succeed in reaching High School standard, while the number of students going beyond High School is smaller still. Whether or not a boy

goes to school, sooner or later he has to follow some trade or profession. Even young men who have had college education, not finding any white-collar jobs, have to turn their minds to other occupations, involving manual labour. The aim of the Institute is to give vocational training to such young men.

2. This training, so far, has not been exactly along modern principles of education, as has already been explained elsewhere, although, considering the inadequacy of the teaching staff, the results cannot be said to be discouraging.

The principle that vocational education should be of a practical nature, and that only those theories should be taught which have a practical bearing on the work, has been adhered to as far as possible. In some cases, however, the emphasis has been too much on the practical side. The Institute has, however, always kept in view the aim that the training in vocational subjects should produce independent farmers and craftsmen and not job-seekers.

3. No systematic record has yet been published of the students who have gone through the various departments of the Institute; therefore it is not possible to evaluate the activities of these departments strictly according to the results.

The students and apprentices come with different aims and purposes, and with different qualifications. According to aims, they may be divided into two classes:

(a) Those who come to get a practical training in one or two of the branches, with the idea of starting their own trades and earning an independent living;

(b) Those who come on deputation from schools, from social service and from other organizations.

These groups can be further divided and classified according to the qualifications of different individuals, which range from illiteracy to college education.

With regard to group (a) success has not come as expected, particularly in agriculture, though not because of inadequate training. Many of these young men, lacking the necessary

capital, have not been able to start businesses of their own. Others, although trained in some branch of agriculture, need both capital and land for their enterprise. In other branches of industry—weaving, carpentry, etc.—every one of the apprentices is making a decent living. In addition to being successful weavers and carpenters they have also become leaders in their small communities in carrying on the work of rural reconstruction.

The results of the training given to group (b) are much more encouraging. As a result of their training in agriculture, weaving and carpentry they have introduced vocational and manual training in their respective schools. These schools are from time to time visited by the instructors from the Institute, and thus a permanent contact is built up with them. The social workers are doing very useful work in their respective fields.

The value of this department has been recognized by the Government as well as by the National Council of Education, which is a national organization for promoting vocational education. Both these bodies have made grants to the Institute for this purpose.

### *Rural Experimental School*

There are a few progressive schools in India, both in the urban and rural areas, but there is hardly any school which can rightly be called "Experimental." Only those schools can be called experimental which are trying out modern principles of education, and modern methods and techniques of teaching, to suit the local conditions, and with the idea of introducing them into other schools if they can be proved successful.

The village school system in India has been condemned over and over again, even by the educational authorities of the Government, and by numerous commissions, Government and missionary, which have investigated the problem from

time to time. However, so far, no constructive policy towards the village schools has been adopted.

The Rural Experimental School is attempting to discover methods, principles and techniques which might be introduced into the village primary schools in Bengal.

The principles followed, although not stated in the phraseology of trained educators, are based upon good common sense, and when examined will be found to be in keeping with the theories and practices of modern education. As with other activities of the Institute, the progress and development of this school have been gradual but natural. Many activities in this school, as well as in the other departments, have been abandoned, and new ones introduced in their place; but no activity has been given up without its having had a fair trial.

Progressive educators would agree as to the need of experimental schools. The need is particularly great in India, because in the field of education, which needs as much experimentation if not more than in other fields of practical science, nothing has been done so far.

The purpose and value of any experiment lie in the application of the results to the welfare of the people. This is the purpose for the establishment of this school.

In lieu of more definite measures of achievement it will be found that the activities of the Rural Experimental School conform to certain educational principles and theories as expounded by John Dewey and others, and commonly accepted by the Western world. Most of these principles have been adopted by the Progressive Education Association of America :

(a) Environment of the school should be that of a good home.

The school, when started, was located, as it were, in the home of the teacher. His mother, wife, sisters and children, all of whom took a keen interest in the development of the children, provided the best home environment. This environ-

ment, however, was not maintained, for, after the death of this teacher, the school was removed to Sriniketan, and the then teachers, being unmarried, could not supply the same atmosphere. They, however, lived with these children, and the visits of the wives of some of the members of the staff and of other womenfolk, and the interest they took in the welfare of the children, helped a great deal towards supplying the home influence.

Whatever may be the situation elsewhere, in India most of the home environment is so inimical to progress that, in order to achieve the best results, the early experimental schools should so far as possible be residential. The pupils learn a great deal of community life and its problems. These children, all coming from different castes (both high and low)—their background different, their temperaments, interests, needs, capacities and aptitudes different—had to live together under one roof as members of one family. They had to work together, play together, and take part in all the activities of their small community. Here was the beginning of a training in civics. The children settled their own disputes, managed their own living affairs. Even the youngest took his turn as captain and assumed household responsibilities, while the others willingly obeyed his orders.

(b) Learning to be thought of as new way of behaving—not in the storing up of information, but in “being.”

The children certainly did change their behaviour after they had been at school for a few months, and changed it for the better. The suspicion they had of each other when they first came gave way to mutual trust. The selfish boy became considerate, the consciousness of caste superiority which was strong in him soon disappeared, and he became one with the rest, regardless of caste difference. He would not eat with the rest—now he did. The other boy who came from a caste much lower in scale was always shy and possessed a strong inferiority complex. Finding sympathy and encouragement

he, too, soon forgot his inferiority. Being physically strong, and unselfish in his habits, he soon became the favourite of all. Instances of such changes are to be found in the account of the school, proving that a change did take place in the behaviour and attitude of these children. They developed morally, socially, culturally and physically.

(c) Education is life—not divorced from life. School activities to be closely related to the life of the pupil and to the life of the society outside.

All the activities of the school, from the simple household duties—cooking, the care of the home, washing, etc.—to the study of the three R's, had some life-purpose in them. The boy who wanted to learn English, for instance, did so for a very definite purpose in life—that of being able to write an address on his letter. Stories from epics were read out to them, not for entertainment, but for making them live the lives of the different characters in their imagination, which they did. Going to market to make their weekly purchases, raising vegetables for their own consumption and flowers to beautify their surroundings—all these activities were connected with their daily life, and each contributed its educative value. On their trips to the local rice mills, the post office, the railway station and other places of interest they saw their relation to their own lives.

- (d) Flexibility of the curriculum and freedom to develop naturally.

From the founding of the school no fixed curriculum was framed. As the need for some particular activity was felt it was brought in. There were no examinations to be passed, no prescribed course to be gone through by a certain time. No plans were made for the day which could not be changed if required. For instance, if the children were to have a lesson in the three R's, or some such subject, and there happened to be a shower the night before, they went out to their garden and worked there, for the soil was soft and could be worked more easily. Often the children themselves expressed the

desire to do one thing or another, and in most cases it was found they had a genuine desire to learn something.

(e) Interest—the motive of all work. Individuality of the pupil to be recognized, and his aptitudes and interests discovered.

From the beginning of the experiment it has been the aim of the school to draw out the interests of the children in all their activities. Their interests did not all lie in one direction, nor did they all have the same aptitudes and capacities. One of the boys had an artistic aptitude. He therefore took charge of all the artistic life of the school, and provision was made for him to develop this aptitude. When the children had some social function which required decorations and an artistic arrangement of things this boy would be in charge of all these arrangements. Another boy was more interested in woodwork, and with very little training began to turn out useful and beautiful articles. He was therefore encouraged to go on with this work. In this way efforts were made to discover the interests of these children, and, so far as possible, facilities were provided for their development. Some of their interests had to be modified and changed into the right direction, but on the whole they were found to be interested in things which had educational values.

(f) The teacher should be a guide and not a taskmaster.

This is no new principle for India, for the traditional relationship between the teacher and his pupils is like that of a father and his children. The students lived in the master's home as members of his family, without even having to pay for their board and lodging or tuition. Under the present-day conditions, however, it is not possible for all teachers to follow this system.

The teachers at the school have been not only guides but friends and brothers to these children. They not only teach them, but play with them, work with them (in their garden plots or in the workshops), go out for picnics and excursions with them, and take part in all the life of the school. This

happy and friendly relationship between the teachers and the pupils is one of the principal features of the school.

Sir Arthur Mayhew, sometime Director of Public Instruction in the Central Provinces, says: "The greatest of evils, however, arising from a State system is its effect on the relation between the teachers and the taught."<sup>1</sup> •

It was not always that the children succeeded in settling their own affairs, and often matters were reported to the teacher. The teacher, instead of deciding with a rod, would sit down and discuss with them, and help them to arrive at some decision. He always acted as a guide, an adviser, a friend, and not as a taskmaster who gave orders which had to be obeyed.

(g) Learning by doing.

Here, again, from the account of the school, one can readily see that this principle has been very strictly followed. As has been stated before, not one of the teachers had any formal professional training, but by good common sense they knew the value of this principle and applied it from the very beginning. Laws of health and sanitation the children learned by keeping themselves, their house and its surroundings clean, and by taking regular physical exercise, which was never by way of merely developing the muscles. They learned their arithmetic lessons by measuring their garden plots and by • keeping account of their products, and in other practical ways. In building the temporary shed for the annual festival they not only performed a very valuable service, but also learned the things which are involved in the building of a shed. Many a valuable lesson was taught to them while they were out working in their garden or in their workshop, or out on an excursion.

This principle too, like many others, is not new in India, although it has been lost sight of. In ancient India the students did not live an inactive life (with regard to manual work).

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Mayhew, *The Education of India*, p. 68.

They took the cattle to pasture, collected firewood, gathered fruit and cultivated the land—in fact they did everything that a householder is expected to do, and through these activities learned the lessons of life.

(h) Education expressive of indigenous culture.

There is a tendency among some of the progressive schools in India to forget that the foundation upon which the system of education should be based must be indigenous and national. While some of the national schools seem to discard almost everything that is not Indian, and base their education on narrow nationalism, Tagore has never believed in this type of narrow nationalism. He has been one of the strongest advocates of internationalism, but at the same time he has realized the value of national culture. Therefore, while he has always tried to accept the best in Western culture, he has succeeded in retaining the national character of the school. The mode of living, the study of indigenous literature, epics, art and music (Tagore's own songs, which are full of national sentiment) and plays—these and many other examples go to show that the Rural Experimental School is based upon indigenous culture, which should be the case with all other Indian schools.

#### CONCLUSION

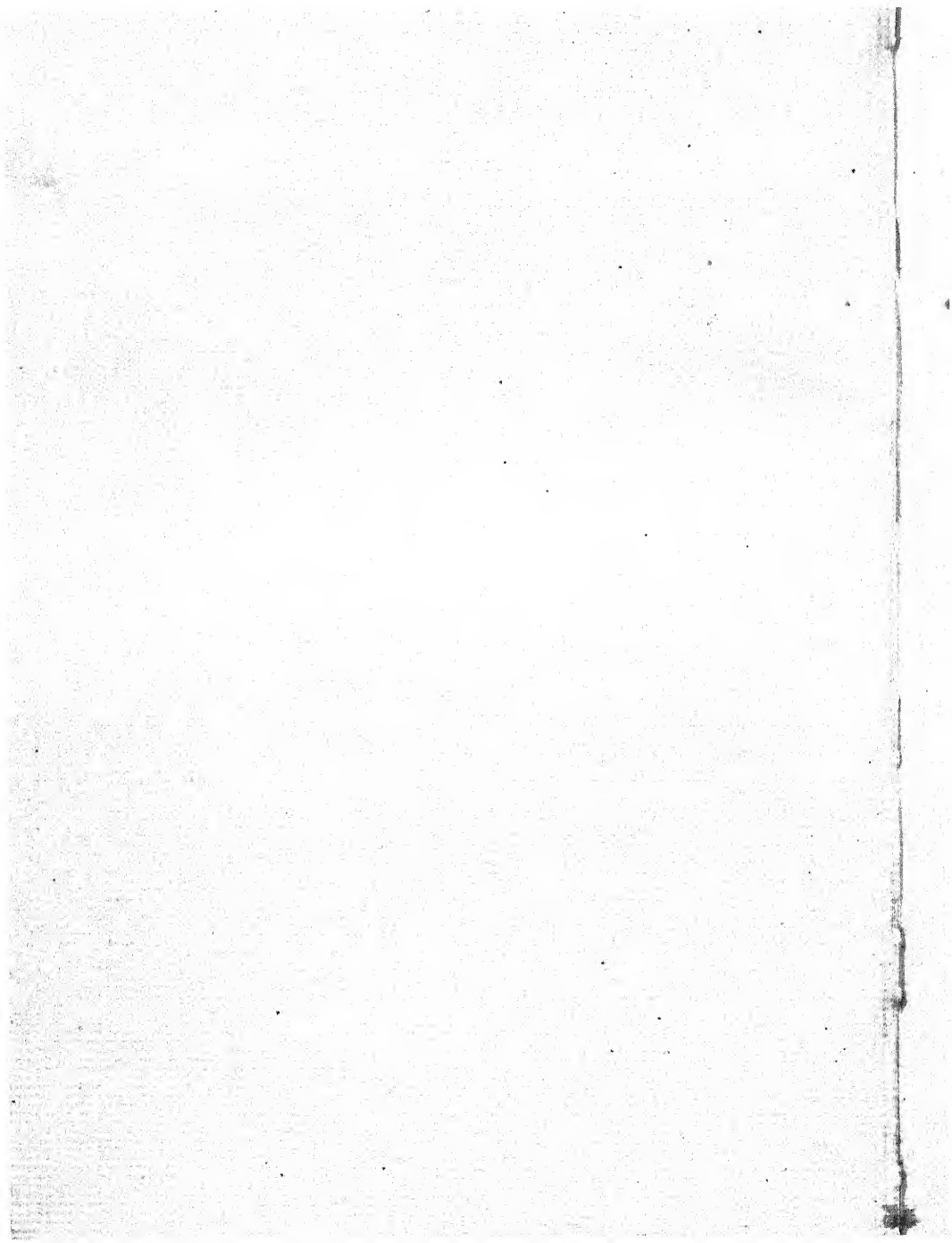
In conclusion it might be said that it has not been the purpose of this chapter to give a false and exaggerated picture of the activities of the Institute. The evaluation has been by no means exhaustive, and all the activities do not stand equally high in their evaluation.

Lack of sufficient funds is often a blessing in disguise. It helps our initiative, develops resourcefulness, promotes co-operation and builds character. In the Rural Experimental School, for instance, most of the children are extremely poor, and can hardly afford to bring even their contribution of food. Charity is by no means encouraged, and the children raise

their own vegetables and produce some cloth or articles of wood which have some economic value. They collect herbs and wild flowers and prepare their own colours. In this way they are learning the dignity of labour, self-respect and independence. And not only do they learn to do these things for themselves, but for others as well. They have gained the idea of service—in giving to others what they themselves have received. Once at the annual sports one of the boys had won several prizes, while most of the others did not get any. The same evening, when they had all assembled after their evening meal, this boy took out his prizes and distributed them among the rest, and felt happy for doing so. Nobody had suggested to him to do such a thing. If the children of the village schools catch this idea of sharing their gifts, and acquire the idea of service, they can make a very valuable contribution to the welfare of their village.

With regard to other activities of the Institute, and the results achieved, it should be borne in mind that we are yet far from attaining the ideal—the forestation of the waste and eroded lands, the re-excavation of tanks and the provision of irrigation facilities, the problem of small-holdings and the tenancy system, and a host of other factors which enter into the question of rural reconstruction but are outside the control of the Institute—and therefore what little has been achieved needs encouragement and sympathy.

# PART III



## CHAPTER VII

### THE RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

THE Royal Commission on Agriculture, in discussing Rural Education, expressed their opinion as follows:

The idea that education in rural areas should bear a close relationship to the daily lives of the people is but recognition of the truth that the environment in which rural workers live is different from that of the towns. It is essential to the happiness and efficiency of children in the villages that their upbringing should be in harmony with their environment, and to this end it is most desirable that every element in the education they receive in their village schools should draw strength and inspiration from the life of the countryside.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, it is upon our philosophy of life that we base our philosophy of education, for whatever we teach or learn will be put into practice according to our philosophy of life.

The philosophy of life of the rural people, even of the rural areas in India, is changing, and Western civilization, directly or indirectly, is responsible for this change.

The philosophy of life as actually practised in the Indian villages may be said to have been fatalistic and individual. The philosophy on which we are going to base our education is social, expressed in terms of the community.

*Aims of Rural Education.*—In detail the aims of rural education may differ according to the peculiar circumstances of the country; in general, and fundamentally, however, the aims of elementary education the world over are the same. They may be listed as follows:

1. Development of health.
2. Citizenship.
3. Literacy.
4. Home-making.
5. Recreation.
6. Cultural activities.
7. Social activities.
8. Religious education.
9. Vocational education.

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Agriculture*, p. 513.

These aims, broadly interpreted, cover the educational purposes of:

1. *Development of Health.*—The development of health should naturally come first, for without good health—physical, moral; emotional and spiritual—it is impossible to follow successfully any programme of education.

In the rural schools of Bengal and most of the other provinces it is difficult to find a single boy who is perfectly healthy. This poor health is not due to poverty alone, for even the children of the well-to-do are found to be suffering from some physical ailment or other. It is due chiefly to ignorance of even the rudimentary laws of health and sanitation. In Bengal nearly all the children have their daily bath before they take their midday meal, but with most of them it is purely a matter of custom, and so long as they have taken a dip in the tank and got themselves wet they think that they have had their bath. At the time of taking their bath they also rinse their clothes, but these are never thoroughly washed. With regard to house-keeping, most of the people are scrupulously clean, and their homes, poor though they may be, are very neat and tidy. But they are completely ignorant of modern ways of sanitation. It is essential, therefore, that not only the habit of keeping their bodies clean be formed among the children, but they should be told why they should be so careful about the cleanliness of their bodies. Without a scientific approach (it may be very elementary) it is not possible to make the children see why it is so necessary that their bodies and their clothing should be clean.

In general, the food of the rural people is much more wholesome, poor though it may be, than that of city people. Rice is the staple article of diet in Bengal. In most of the villages the people store rice, or paddy, as it is called, in its unhusked form, and husk it daily according to their requirements. Large quantities of rice are exported to other parts of India, and throughout the country districts are to be found numerous rice mills. The result is that most of the village people, who

have to work as day-labourers, buy from the market the rice which is husked and polished in these mills. This rice has lost most of the nutritive elements, while that which was husked by the old indigenous devices retained its nutritive value. In addition to rice, pulses form the next major portion of the diet. Green vegetables are not always to be had, and when they are available most of the poor people cannot afford to buy them. During certain months of the year, however, there are plenty of greens to be had in the fields, and these can be used for food. Only occasionally do the people manage to have fish; while meat, even for those who are meat-eaters, is a luxury, and is eaten only on rare occasions. Milk, too, is a luxury which the poor and even the middle class cannot afford, even in small quantities—at least in this section of Bengal. This is due to the fact that the district has scarcely any fodder, and consequently cattle are extremely poor. Fruits are practically out of the question for the village people except during the mango season, when they can be had in abundance. In some years there are very heavy crops of mangoes, but the people do not know how to preserve them. There are a few, however, who do, and these prepare pickles from them, or dry the raw fruit for flavouring food. It is very necessary that elementary education in the selection and preparation of a balanced diet be given in the rural schools.

As pointed out in the chapter on Scout organization, it is through the children that the health programme of the whole village is going to be carried out. Through the Scout organization they will be doing the practical work in the fighting of malaria and other preventable diseases, but it is at school that they will learn what these diseases are, what causes them, and how to keep themselves free from them. Instruction in first aid should also form part of the curriculum of village schools.

In most cases of illness, even when medical aid is available, the people, partly because of ignorance and partly because of poverty, do not avail themselves of these advantages until the case becomes severe, or even beyond control. At such an

advanced stage the people seek medical aid if they are able to pay for it, or if it is to be had free, but by that time the physician can do little or nothing. How many millions of cases of such silent sufferers there are in the country it is not possible to estimate. Here, again, it is through the school children that the parents have to be taught when to apply for medical aid; and in the beginning the children will have to take the lead in reporting all cases of illness to the nearest physician and getting medical aid. In Soviet Russia, for example, it is the Young Pioneers who are trying to teach their parents lessons in personal hygiene and sanitation. Medical aid is not always readily obtainable, nor is it within the means of everybody. It would cost the Government millions to establish hospitals and dispensaries throughout the rural areas to meet the needs of the people, and yet some day the Government will think fit to spend even these millions for such a cause. A large number of the prevalent diseases, however, could be eliminated with the help of schools if only the children were sufficiently educated in the fundamentals of personal hygiene and sanitation—not as merely theoretical subjects but as actual experiences in forming health habits.

Whatever the programme of health education may be in these schools, the thing that is most important is not so much the knowledge of questions relating to health as the actual practice of health habits. To gain this end we want the village teacher to be a healthy specimen of humanity, whose example will teach the children more hygiene than any lesson.

2. *Citizenship*.—The school should be a miniature society, a democracy on a small scale. Children, to-day the active members of this miniature democracy, will be active participants of the larger democracy of to-morrow. The children of Bengal are members first of their own families, then of their particular caste in the village, as well as of the same caste in other villages. Following the caste membership comes the membership of the village as a community. There is a strong

fellow-feeling among the people of all castes residing in a village. After the village the province is next in order, and here it is the language more than anything else which binds the people together and brings about a certain amount of solidarity. This feeling of kinship can be very clearly seen, for instance, when two Bengalis, belonging to different castes, meet outside their own province. Following the province in community feeling is the citizenship of the whole country, and finally of the world. This last phase should have a place in the curriculum of even the village primary school, and it should be strongly impressed on the children that, small though they be, and living in a remote part of the world, they have responsibilities towards the members of the whole human race. Perhaps citizenship should occupy a more important place in the schools (rural as well as urban) of India than in any other country, because of her numerous castes and religions, which have created such strong and artificial barriers between members of the same race and the same country. It is the evils of these caste distinctions that are responsible to a large extent for the social, economic and political downfall of the country.

The schools have the great responsibility of removing the old ideas which so long have separated man from man—ideas and beliefs which have caused him to care more for the life of an ant than for the life of a fellow human being. In short, the whole structure of society has to be rebuilt, and the children are to be the citizens, not of one particular caste, but of the whole village in which the child of the follower of the humblest trade will find a place next to the child who has been so fortunate as to be born into the home of a high-caste family. Indirectly there are numerous agencies which have already done much to help to break down the evils of the caste system, but there is yet much more to be done. We cannot expect any appreciable change in the attitude of the older generation. The hope for the future rests only with the youth and with the children. Their eyes have to be opened to the

existence of these evils, and no attempt should be made to defend the system as it exists to-day. The little Brahmin should be made to feel that he is in no way better than the child of a Dom (a very low caste), and the child of a Dom should be made to feel that his capacities are by no means inferior to those of the Brahmin or of other higher castes.

These rural schools not only have to open their doors to children of all castes, but they have to inculcate in their minds a recognition of the equality of all people, regardless of their castes. It is a very hard task for the teacher to put these revolutionary ideas into practice, but he is the only person who can do it, and unless this is done we may as well drop citizenship from our curriculum. It is not a Utopian idea by any means, for there are plenty of young men in Bengal full of enthusiasm and filled with national ideas who have already broken away from caste traditions. They need only to be trained and organized for such service. Only when the school-children understand the meaning of citizenship in this new light can we hope for freedom for the whole nation. They will have to be active citizens; they will have to do more than merely sit and demand their rights from others. First they must realize what their own duties are towards their fellow-men. These, as summarized by the late Dr Bonser for citizens in general, are as follows:

To be a good citizen one must realize that one has an obligation to do everything one can to keep well and help to make conditions for good health in one's community; to be honest and fair in all business dealings; to co-operate helpfully in all good and desirable community enterprises for the well-being and happiness of the people of the community; to help to secure desirable laws and regulations for the protection of people and property, and to aid in the enforcement of these laws and regulations; to restrain one's own personal desires when these are in any way in conflict with the well-being of others; to be sensitive to the needs of others and sympathetic in helping to meet these needs; and to feel a responsibility for defending and supporting the rights and privileges of others and one's self against harmful influences, even at the cost of great sacrifice to one's self. But more than merely to know of these duties and privileges one must practise them, one must have the habit or attitude of actually

doing that which it is right to do. One must do all that one can to keep one's self and others well and free from the causes of disease and bodily harm; one must practise honesty and fair dealing; one must show one's love of community and country by serving them in every way one can, and one must have the courage of one's convictions.<sup>1</sup>

In the villages to which the activities of the Institute have extended people are gradually beginning to realize their responsibilities towards their fellow-villagers; they are beginning to understand more and more that the only hope for the improvement of their condition lies in each working not only for himself but for the common good, that the dirty surroundings of one's home affect not only the particular household but the whole village. Thus do both the school and the Extension Department develop the civic aims of education.

3. *Literacy*.—The present curriculum of the rural schools in Bengal, as well as in the rest of the country, consists almost wholly of the three R's, and even these are most unsatisfactorily taught. For this the teacher is not to blame in most cases, since he himself does not know much beyond the three R's. The schools are regarded primarily as agencies for the removal of illiteracy. How far they achieve this end can be seen from the number of pupils who leave school without being able to read or write, while many of those who do learn something soon forget all that they were taught and revert again into illiteracy.

The mass of the people do not as yet appreciate the advantages of the schools, because the whole system has been based upon the idea that going to school means preparing oneself for some position not involving manual labour, and cutting oneself off from one's village and from one's ancestral profession. While it is not the purpose of rural education and of the teaching of the three R's to prepare pupils for "white-collar" jobs, yet its intention is not to tie the pupils down to their ancestral trades. The three R's are merely tool subjects, and literacy is better than illiteracy any day. It is absolutely

<sup>1</sup> F. G. Bonser, *The Elementary School Curriculum*, pp. 396-397.

necessary for any civilized person to be able to read and write and count even for daily practical purposes. Moreover, it is partly through the three R's that we expect our village children to learn better hygienic habits, and, if they become cultivators, to enable them to grow two stalks of paddy where only one stood before, as well as to enable them to live a better and a richer life.

Whatever other subjects may be in the curriculum, it is quite plain that the three R's have to be included. They are needed as tool subjects, by means of which the children, while they are at school, and much more so after they leave school, may learn better ways of living, whether it be in their own village or elsewhere. Literacy is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

4. *Home-making*.—The home is one of the most important formative agencies, and yet it cannot have much educative influence on the children if the parents themselves have no education. In many cases the good influence of the school is offset by the contrary influence of the home environment, and educators are faced with the problem of how to arrange the school activities so that the pupils may not only withstand these contrary influences, but may themselves exert an educative influence in their homes. This is being attempted in some countries, like Soviet Russia and the United States of America. In the former, through the Young Pioneers, the parents are being taught better sanitary ways of living, and are given instruction in the doctrines of the Communist Government, while in the latter, in the rural areas, better methods of agriculture (farm practices) are taught to the parents through their sons and daughters by means of Junior Extension Work and Home Projects.

In India there is great need for the reconstruction of the home, for, in the programme of rural reconstruction, the beginning has to be made in the home. The children who are going to be the householders of to-morrow have to be taught how to make better homes; they have to be made conscious

of their home relations—what they are and what they ought to be.

The schools should help to develop in their pupils the right attitudes towards the various members of the family—towards their mothers and sisters. Boys should demand from their parents the same education for their sisters also.

Our ideal village home of the future is going to be free from all social evils and religious superstitions; it is going to be a healthy home, following the laws of sanitation and hygiene; it is going to be a home in which boys and girls and men and women enjoy equal rights and equal freedom; it will be a home in which strangers, irrespective of their caste or creed, find a welcome; and lastly, each home will be an important constituent of the village life. The only way in which we can expect every home in the village to achieve this ideal is by giving a thorough training in the making of such homes to the children while they are still at school.

5. *Recreation.*—The old-type schools—and nearly all the rural and urban schools of India are of the old type—have very little to do with the recreation of the pupils except for a few games and sports. The duty of the school is considered to be in the teaching of the three R's only. Their aim is to give information, not to develop the pupils physically.

In the curriculum of the schools we cannot draw a line between recreational and purely academic activities; they are intimately connected and cannot be separated. As a matter of fact all the work in the school should be considered as recreation—"play which is work, and work which is play."

The school should see to it that the pupils become interested not only in such activities of recreation as are beneficial to themselves in building up their individual personalities, but also in those which will be of service to the society in which they are living. At the same time any recreational habits that are detrimental to the development of personality and to the interests of society should be discouraged and, if necessary, suppressed.

The school cannot undertake the developing of all the various impulses and capacities of the child, but it can direct these impulses in the right direction. It is in the recreational activities rather than in the academic routine of the school that children give full expression to their natural impulses. A boy who may be very shy in the classroom may be very loquacious and free while taking part in a drama. It is on the playground or on excursions that the real character and capacities of children are brought into full view. The teacher who takes part in the recreational activities of the children knows more about their abilities and about their different traits than does the language or the arithmetic teacher, for even in the most progressive schools some children are always shy and unnatural in their behaviour.

Recreation promotes a wholesome development of the capacities and functions; it prolongs the period of youth by creating the conditions necessary for both physical and mental health; it serves as a tonic to the organism by adding to the zest of living; and, above all, it lends colour and sweetness and beauty to life. Since recreation takes place under the conditions of freedom, it provides opportunity for the manifold expressions of personality; and, all constraining influences being relatively absent, the self is permitted to develop according to the laws of its own being and in response to its own potentialities.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Dewey, in the following words, speaks of the significance of the use of leisure:

Play and art are moral necessities. They are required to take care of the margin that exists between the total stock of impulses that demand outlet and the amount expended in regular action. They keep the balance which work cannot indefinitely maintain. They are required to introduce variety, flexibility and sensitiveness into disposition.<sup>2</sup>

A well-organized curriculum in the rural school should contain all the recreational activities that have been listed. Children throughout the world are fond of play and athletics, and Bengal children are no exception. Play and athletics, however, seem to be taken out of the lives of the rural children.

<sup>1</sup> Chapman and Counts, *Principles of Education*, p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, p. 160.

Among the indigenous games scarcely any are suitable for healthy physical exercise and team-work. Only those who have been to city schools know anything about games. Very few village teachers have been to a city school, and few consequently have ever played any games at all. In order to put into effect a programme of athletics a new generation of teachers will be necessary, who will not only be trained in the modern methods of teaching, but who will also be good at sports. Among the modern games football has become the favourite in Bengal. The keen interest that people take in this game can be seen from the crowds who come to watch it. The village child loves nothing better than football, and this game, along with other Scout games, can be easily introduced into the village schools.

The village Scout organization can take charge of the recreation in athletics. An account of this is given more fully in another chapter. Here it is sufficient to say that the development of health is one of the aims of rural education, which can partly be achieved through games and sports.

6. *Cultural Activities*.—Civilization in India had its origin in the villages and was built up largely on village folk-lore, music, dancing, fairs and festivals. The old civilization cannot be revived; it should be reconstructed, however, in the light of modern life and modern civilization. As has been pointed out elsewhere, the villages offer no attraction to the modern youth, who usually drifts into the cities, attracted largely by the recreational opportunities offered there. These recreational opportunities are by no means always of a desirable type. The villages have still a chance of building up a healthy recreational system free from the evils which beset most city recreations. One way to help to check this exodus to the city is to provide healthy, intelligent, cultural and interesting recreational activities for the young men and women, thus enabling them to enjoy life to the full in a more beautiful and healthy atmosphere.

(a) *Dramatics*.—The Bengali language and the Bengali

temperament are particularly well fitted for dramatics. The children love to act. By means of short plays not only can their æsthetic sensibilities be cultivated, but very valuable lessons on morals, reforms in social and religious matters, on co-operation, health and sanitation, can be impressed. It is through plays of this type that illiterate India has been able to retain most of her folk-lore, religion and history.

(b) *Music*.—Music has been not only one of the most important features of Indian culture, but also an instrument for the perpetuation of this culture through the ages. In all the ceremonials instrumental music and chanting of hymns are used; and although music as an art has been almost forgotten, the love of it still dwells in the hearts of the people. In the evenings, while passing through the countryside, where everything is perfectly quiet except for the squeaking noise of a passing bullock-cart, one finds the silence suddenly broken by singing in the distance. It may be the song of a carter or of a labourer going home. The women, returning home after a hard day's work in the fields or in the rice mill, always go singing. Music is thus the very life and soul of the people. But it has been rigidly kept out of the school curriculum. An effort has been made lately, however, to introduce it into the schools. It would be one of the greatest blessings if education could give to the rural people this revival of Indian music. Through it the simple life of the village folk, although poor in material things, could be made in other respects rich and beautiful.

Indian folk-songs are known to only a few professionals, and, with the advent of cheap theatrical music, they, too, are fast disappearing. The value of music in education was recognized even by the ancient Greek philosophers. Plato gave music a very high place in his programme of education, and insisted that every citizen should learn music. In India also music was considered of value, because "it let in the light of the universal through one of the windows of the soul."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> S. V. Venkateswara, *Indian Culture through the Ages*, p. 305.

Through music, then, the children will not only draw inspiration, but also find expression for the deep longings of their souls.

(c) *Art.*—India is widely known for its arts and crafts. With the development of the artistic life of the children the village life can be made more beautiful, the homes better places to live in, and individual life enriched by culture. The children should be taught to use local materials in making artistic things. The rural areas possess very rich materials which are utterly wasted and not made use of at all, and children can be taught to make use of them in creating fresh patterns and designs. It is not perfection of technique in art that we should stress in these rural schools; rather we should seek to develop an appreciation of artistic things and the desire to create them. Through such training and appreciation children will learn what is beautiful and good.

7. *Social Activities.*—The existing social activities in the villages can hardly be said to possess educational value. Social visits are occasions for gossip rather than for worthy purposes, and yet there is nothing else to take the place of gossip. Opportunities exist, however, for making social activities worth while. People are eager to know what is going on outside their own little world, and anyone with a newspaper can attract quite a crowd to listen to the news of the day. There is always somebody in the village who subscribes to a paper, and it can be borrowed for the use of the school-children both in school and in their homes, where they may also stimulate the interest of the adult members of their families. This will not only improve their own reading power, and add to their information, but will also encourage them to be of service to others.

Other social activities which have been fully discussed in the chapter on the Brati-Balaka (Scout) Organization need not be mentioned here; but the fact may be pointed out that the aim of the rural school is to organize these activities not only for social and educational purposes, but also for service to the community.

8. *Religious Education.*—In including religious education in the public schools the first question that we are confronted with is whether it is possible to have any system of religious education in a country like India, in which there are so many different religions. In this matter the Government has remained neutral so far as religious teaching is concerned; and very wisely too, because the people are so sharply divided into different religious groups that it has not been found possible to introduce the teaching of any one religion without offending other religious groups. The sectarian schools, however, do have religious education as part of their programme. This religious education can hardly be called religious. At best it may be called instruction in particular religions, and usually it is of an indoctrinating sectarian nature, attempting to prove the superiority of one religion over another.

It is a very serious question as to whether such a proposal to teach religion in the schools would be accepted by the Government, or even by private schools; there is, however, a place for religious education in all urban and rural schools. The whole of Indian life is bound up with religion. Eating and drinking, social intercourse, even travelling, all require religious sanction. The removal of all kinds of superstitious beliefs, the teaching of tolerance towards other religions and of the virtues which are to be found in all religions should form part of the school curriculum. But no theological doctrine of any particular religion can be taught, for that would offend people rather than bring them together.

The aim of education is the development of the whole man, and if we include the religious and spiritual life as part of a man's life we cannot exclude religion from our education. India being so divided by her religious beliefs, the removal of religious prejudices and the giving of a broad religious education should be undertaken by the schools.

Possibly the best way to achieve religious instruction would be by the use of special text-books containing selections and explanations from all the important religions of the country.

A very important aim of religious teaching should be the bringing together of the people of different religions. This can be done only when people have some knowledge of the different religions. During their early years at school children should be given to understand in a simple childlike way that all religions have but one aim—that of deliverance of the soul from the grip of self, not for a selfish purpose, but in order that one may be of service to the society in which one finds oneself and to humanity as a whole. The prejudice that is the cause of so much trouble among people of different religious faiths is due to ignorance. If people only knew not only about their own religion but something about other religions as well there would be less prejudice and more tolerance.

Early in life the minds of children become filled with superstitious ideas about religion. They visit the religious fairs and take part in the religious festivals. They are led by their mothers to the temples to worship. They are not allowed to take part in the religious festivals of other people; and in one way or another they acquire a prejudice against other religions, for no reason whatsoever.

In practical life religion does not seem to play a very great part. People of practically all faiths are very particular about fulfilling all the outward formalities with regard to their respective religions—going to church, to the temples, mosques, and even making pilgrimages—but very few people try to acquire the real spirit of religion. The mass of the people—millions of simple village folk—however, try much more faithfully to live up to their beliefs than do the average townsmen; and yet if anything needs immediate and drastic reform it is religion. The whole life of the people—social, economic and political—is bound up with it.

Instead of lessening, the gulf that separates them seems to be growing wider and wider. Religion is at once the blessing and the curse of the country. The Hindu religion contains some of the deepest and most helpful philosophies, and yet

through the same religion millions are kept down, all considered as untouchables, and continue in this untouchable condition for all time to come, and from one generation to another. Islam, on the other hand, while preaching universal brotherhood, tends to be fanatical and aggressive. Not only Hinduism and Islam, but Christianity and a host of other religions have their place in India; but they must all live in harmony and not be at war with one another, for then they cease to be religions. What, then, is to be done with this most vital question of religion, which is the cause of so much misery, superstition, corruption and hatred? Education, and education alone, is the solution to the problem. But what kind of education? Thousands of people in India have had this usual education; but are they free from hatred and prejudice? We must say that education as it is to-day has not solved, and cannot solve, this problem. The introduction of religious education in schools may be a mere experiment, but it is perhaps the only experiment that can be tried before the most drastic one—that which Soviet Russia is trying out—finds its way into India. Religion has a place in the life of every human being, but not the type of religion that is to be found to-day.

Only through schools then can the problem be solved. The schools should evoke in the pupils an attitude of reverence, and give them a thorough grounding in the elementary virtues of truth, justice and charity. They must teach the best in every religion, not only tolerance, but also an active appreciation of other faiths. True religion should unite, not divide, people.

9. *Vocational Education.*—It is a debatable question whether or not vocational education should be included in the curriculum of the village elementary and primary schools.

The argument in favour of its inclusion is, that since all the people of the rural areas are engaged in some kind of occupation which needs improvement along modern lines, it is desirable that these village schools to some extent should prepare their pupils to meet their life situations while they are yet in school.

H. W. Foght, in his book, *The Rural Teacher and his Work*, has expressed his opinion as follows: "The purpose of rural schools is avowedly to prepare rural folk for useful, contented lives on the land."<sup>1</sup>

W. A. Wilkinson, in *Rural School Management*, says:

It seems only fair that young people who may be reasonably expected to spend their lives on the farm should be given the kind of education that will enable them to get the largest possible return from their farms, make their home life most satisfying, and discharge the duties of citizenship in the most efficient manner.<sup>2</sup>

As against these arguments, though as a compromise, Professor Mabel Carney, in her book, *Country Life and Country School*, says: "We should make agriculture and farm-life experience the starting-point of elementary education, not its ultimate goal."<sup>3</sup>

Butterfield, while holding more or less the same view as Professor Carney, goes a little further. He says:

The reason for introducing agriculture and country life subjects into the average country school is not primarily to educate for agriculture, but to educate by means of agriculture. There comes a time, it is true, when a boy must make his choice, and if he is to be a farmer he ought to be definitely and thoroughly educated for agriculture. But it would be absolutely mischievous to plan the rural school system on such a basis as to direct all the boys and girls back to the farm, and to make it difficult or impossible for them to compete with the city boy or girl in other professions and occupations of life. And further, the idea of keeping all farm boys on the farm is the poorest policy we could follow. We cannot afford to arrange our rural school education so that the boy is obliged to stay on the farm or go to the city handicapped in his preparation for life.<sup>4</sup>

These have been some of the views held by authorities on rural life and rural education in U.S.A. To-day, on account of the changes that have taken place in the economic life of the people, and on account of the industrial civilization, they are discarded as out-of-date. For India, however, which by

<sup>1</sup> H. W. Foght, *The Rural Teacher and his Work*, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> W. A. Wilkinson, *Rural School Management*, p. 377.

<sup>3</sup> Mabel Carney, *Country Life and Country School*, p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> K. L. Butterfield, *The Farmer and the New Day*, p. 109.

reason of its poverty is centuries behind the times as compared with America, and because most of the village children are obliged to remain in their villages, these views hold good to-day, and will continue to do so for several more years to come.

In India improved machinery has not yet found its way to the farms, and so on that account there has been no decrease in the rural population, most of whom still depend on agriculture for their livelihood. But quite a number of the rural people not possessing land, and others finding agriculture very uncertain—due to unfavourable conditions of rainfall and lack of irrigation facilities, as well as to the small size of farm-holdings—insufficient to support large families—have found it more profitable to move into factory and mining areas, where they are at least assured of a regular income. In this way nearly everybody, whether he is living in the village or has drifted into industrial centres, still follows some profession involving manual labour. The only people who leave the village and secure white-collar jobs in the cities are from the landlord or upper middle classes, and their number is very small. Such people in any case do not depend on these small rural schools for the education of their children. The great majority of rural children, on the other hand, remain in the villages; and the purpose of rural education is to prepare the rural people according to their particular needs. It is most desirable, therefore, that we should have some kind of vocational training in these schools.

In the United States of America it is not necessary to have agriculture as a vocational subject in the rural elementary schools, for under the Smith Lever Act the Extension Departments of the State Agricultural Colleges take care of it in part through the organization of 4-H Clubs for boys and girls.

For the most part, however, the United States being a land of high economic level retains its children in school longer than is the case in India, and provides vocational training in the secondary schools. Village children in India, on

the other hand, remain in school but a short time, and go out to spend their lives in a poverty-conditioned environment, where the only immediate hope of improvement lies in better agriculture. Under these circumstances the teaching of vocations on the elementary school level can be clearly justified.

In Indian educational circles in general there is a difference of opinion as to the introduction of vocational education in the village primary schools. Some believe that vocational education should come after the primary-school stage, while there are others who think that it is advisable to have vocational education in the primary years.

In the *Eighth Quinquennial Review of Education (India)*, vol. i., pp. 21-22, we find that:

The most successful experiments in agricultural education appear to be those which include agricultural teaching in the ordinary curriculum of the rural school, thereby not debarring boys of real ability from proceeding to higher education, while ensuring that those who, through failure at examination, or lack of other openings, return to the land do so with more skilled knowledge of their future occupation.

The *Report of the Indian Industrial Commission, 1916-1918* (p. 17), refers to the striking successes, along with failures, and states that where the school has satisfied the requirements of the locality it has succeeded; where the work has been organized without reference to local conditions the result has been disappointing.

From this evidence it is clear that vocational education is peculiarly needed in India, and can be a success if introduced according to the requirements of the locality. It should therefore be one of the aims of the rural schools.

#### CURRICULUM

The Auxiliary Committee appointed by the Indian Statutory Commission, in their *Interim Report*, makes the following remark about the curriculum in primary schools:

Much criticism has been levelled against the curriculum adopted in the primary schools. A curriculum unrelated to the conditions of

village life results in a divorce between the interests of the school and the interests of the home, and in the stiffening of the belief among the rural population that little benefit is to be obtained from the sacrifice involved in sending their children to school.<sup>1</sup>

That there is urgent need for a complete reorganization of the curriculum in the rural primary schools is found in the opinion of the Commissioners of the Statutory Commission, who have again expressed their opinion as follows:

The ultimate object of all steps taken to improve the provision and organization of the schools is of course the improvement of the work actually done. There are welcome signs that attempts are being made in most provinces to review the curricula of vernacular schools so as to bring them and the methods of teaching into greater harmony with the needs and conditions of village children. While in a primary school in India little can be attempted at present beyond instruction in reading, writing and elementary arithmetic, and while the need of extending literacy is so great that for some time "Three R's and no nonsense" must be the motto of the schools, it is essential that the instruction should be related in the early stages to matters which the village child sees and knows and understands. He should be taught to read and to do sums about things which are a reality and not a mystery to him. The great majority of the villages are in urgent need of better conditions of life, better understanding of sanitation, medical relief, freedom from debt, and social and intellectual awakening. We, therefore, feel strongly that the aim of every village school should include not merely the attainment of literacy, but the larger objective—namely, the raising of the standard of village life in all its aspects. A well-attended school directly related to the surrounding conditions can do much towards training the younger generation in ways of hygiene, physical culture, improved sanitation, thrift and self-reliance. The school itself can also, as notable examples have proved, claim a leading and respected place in the village community by directly assisting, in however simple a manner, in the provision of simple medical relief, adult instruction, vernacular literature and attractive recreation. With the present standards of teaching, buildings and equipment, progress in these directions must necessarily be slow; but the recent revision of training and school courses and the objective mind at the Punjab have demonstrated how far a determined policy can succeed.<sup>1</sup>

From the statement above made it is clear that even the Government admits having the most inadequate and unsatisfactory curricula in the rural schools. But while they make

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Statutory Commission Interim Report*, p. 78.

such careful observations and pious resolutions they offer no constructive programme for bringing about the necessary changes in any of the rural schools of Bengal.

*Philosophy underlying Curriculum-making.*—With regard to the philosophy underlying curriculum-making Dr Bonser says:

As representing the large, main life purposes, we may say that the curriculum is relatively fixed and permanent; as representing the detailed approaches to these larger purposes through the immediate interests and activities of each community, we may say that it is ever in a state of change.<sup>1</sup>

The making of curriculum is very largely influenced by the philosophy of life and the philosophy of education the curriculum makers have. One of the responsibilities of the school to its community is "to provide it with a group of socially minded, intellectually alert, sanely independent, progressive young people. . . . And if education does not thus modify these young people, and through them their environment, it is not effective." Since education must be lived to be possessed, the school's responsibility to improve the community is increased. In order that better standards of living, new ideals, the broader outlook taught by the schools may be reinforced by the home, and actually achieved by the pupils, the school may be compelled at times to undertake more directly the improvement of the cultural level of the home and community. However, all activities fostered by the school should be so selected and directed as to give a maximal return to the child. Whatever value accrues to the adults and community must be secondary to a programme which puts child development first. Any programme which subordinates the child's welfare to adult community service is educationally unsound.<sup>2</sup>

The curriculum should be conceived, therefore, in terms of a succession of experiences and enterprises having a maximum of life-likeness for the learner. The materials of instruction should be selected and organized with a view to giving the learner that development most helpful in meeting and controlling life situations.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the curriculum of the existing village schools may be, the fact is that it has no relation to the conditions of village life and the life of the children, and consequently does not prepare them to meet the problems of life.

There are thousands of village schools in Bengal, but they

<sup>1</sup> F. G. Bonser, *The Elementary School Curriculum*, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> *National Society for the Study of Education Thirteenth Year-Book*, Part I. G.

<sup>3</sup> O. G. Brim, *Guiding Principles in Rural Education*, pp. 261-272.

have not been able to reduce the number of cases suffering from malaria by means of their curriculum, nor have they given the pupils any knowledge about preventable diseases; they have not shown them the advantages of a well-ventilated house, the cleanliness of their home surroundings and of their village life. They have not given them any information as to why health habits have to be formed.

The same can be said of the children's attitudes—towards members of their families, towards members of their caste, towards those of other castes and towards the whole village. Again the curriculum has not provided anything to change these attitudes in the children.

One of the first principles of education is the formation of habits and of changing one's behaviour. The children, at the age when they go to school, cannot be said to have formed habits of any kind which at that early stage cannot be changed by means of purposeful and thought-provoking activities. Curriculum activities, psychologically arranged, according to the growing needs, interests and capacities of the children, should bring about desirable changes in the children, and change their attitudes and behaviour.

Even in the case of providing literacy the curriculum provides nothing beyond the three R's, and without any motive on the part of the pupils. Children learn to read parrot-like, and to write mechanically and from memory, without a real interest in what they are reading or writing. What they read or write has little or no connection with their interests and experience. A curriculum based on sound psychology will enable the pupils to read and write with interest and with a definite motive in their minds.

One of the ways to change the behaviour and attitude of the pupils is by means of an activity curriculum.

Whether a certain activity curriculum has been effective can be measured not so much by what the children know as by what they become. In such a curriculum it is easy to watch the development of the children. If desirable results do not

seem to be forthcoming, the teacher has to stimulate their interests.

At the end of four years, through such a curriculum, there should be found a decided change in the development and attitudes of these children—development in their health habits, in their being able to read and write, and to do sums which have some bearing on their own lives and experience, and on the life of their community; and attitudes towards their fellow-villagers irrespective of caste distinctions.

Such a change has been brought about in the children at the Rural Experimental School; the same can be achieved in the villages.

*Methods and Techniques of Teaching.*—The old conception of teaching, which is still in vogue in a great majority of both urban and rural schools in India, is that teaching as a profession requires no particular training, and that anyone who has gone to school or college can teach what he has learned. It recognizes teaching neither as an art nor as an applied science.

The second conception, in the opinion of Dr Bagley, is that of teaching as an applied science or as a technological art.<sup>1</sup> There is much truth in this conception, for modern teaching does require the services of science—*e.g.* of psychology, or a systematic study of the human mind; physiology, or the study of the machinery of the human body. As a result of these studies the curriculum is prepared to suit the different physiological and psychological traits and capacities of children. Different ways and techniques are also used in teaching different subjects to different pupils, taking into consideration their individual differences (needs, interests and capacities).

According to the third conception, teaching is thought of as a fine art, more emphasis being laid on the creative element in the whole process, both of teaching and of learning.

We can safely omit the first conception altogether, as being

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion see Dr W. C. Bagley's contribution in the *Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*, Bulletin 14, 1920, pp. 179-180.

completely out of date, and against all modern educational principles and theories based upon the results of scientific research.

The true conception of teaching is a combination of the last two—teaching as an applied science and technological art, and as a fine art—and with such a conception of teaching in mind we can proceed with the methods and techniques that are needed in the rural primary schools.

Methods and techniques are very important, because through them we expect to reach our goal or aim in education; and in efficiency in teaching, in the saving of time, and in achieving the best results the methods employed always play a very important part.

Methods and techniques will depend also to some extent upon the aim of education. The aim of primary schools in the rural areas is to remove illiteracy, with a view to opening the eyes of the children to the advantages of better living. Under the present methods of teaching even literacy cannot be attained. Both the methods of teaching and the contents of the subject-matter need to be changed.

It is only in a few missionary and private schools that a definite attempt to modernize teaching has been carried out. Under the old system even the learning of alphabets takes weeks and months, while learning to read the elementary textbooks takes years. The average period of attendance for a child at school being only three or four years, very few ever learn to read properly before they have to leave school.

Those who succeed in learning the three R's know them only as three R's—their learning is not a part of their daily experiences, nor is it associated with their needs and interests. Much time will be saved, better efficiency secured, the aims of education achieved, and learning will become part of the pupils' experience, if proper methods and techniques are used in teaching.

It is recognized by leading educators that the aim of education is not merely to impart knowledge, skill and habits; it

is to promote an all-round development of the individual—physically, intellectually, morally and spiritually. Further, the aim of education is to promote the development of the whole man, not only in his own personal interests, but in the interests of society and of the whole human race.

*Principles of Teaching.*—Some of the important principles which will have to be considered before adopting any methods and techniques of teaching are listed as follows <sup>1</sup>:

(a) The child is the centre of gravity and all activities have to be built round him. He is to be regarded not only as an individual but as a personality, and the development of his personality should be the business of education.

(b) Provision has to be made for individual differences in children as well as differences in teaching different subjects.

(c) A scientific study of the pupils' environment and of the means of utilizing this environment must be made.

(d) All teaching has to be psychological.

(e) Education must be connected with life and life experiences, and the interests and activities of the school should be closely connected with life and life experiences.

(f) Pupils should be allowed to develop in an atmosphere of freedom and not that of restraint.

(g) The child should be recognized not only as an individual and as a personality but also as a member of society, and the development of his personality should be in the interests of society.

*Methods.*—Following these principles numerous methods bearing different names have appeared, and are appearing daily, on the teaching market. Avent has listed some of the most important methods employed by teachers as follows <sup>2</sup>:

1. The Story Method.
2. The Lecture Method.
3. The Laboratory or Experimental Method.

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<sup>1</sup> Most of these principles are to be found in the works of John Dewey; other educational principles are given in Chapter VI.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph E. Avent, *Beginning Teaching*, pp. 97-98.

4. The Discovery Method.
5. The Inductive Method.
6. The Telling Method.
7. The Development Method.
8. The Showing Method.
9. The Recitation Method.
10. The Method of Topical Report.
11. The Dramatic Method.
12. The Conversation Method.
13. The Discussion Method.
14. The Problem Method.
15. The Project Method.
16. The Contest Method.
17. The Objective Method.
18. The Deductive and Expressive Methods.
19. The Question Method.

A superior teacher can never be restricted to any one method. He is adept at changing his methods to suit the needs, interests and capacities of his pupils. While not altogether ignoring the use of printed text-books, he is able to prepare his own text-books and have his pupils do the same. He knows when and where to follow the different methods and techniques; he can see something good in almost every method, and can find a place for each one of them in his teaching.

Whatever methods the teachers of the village schools may use, the use of environment is the most important. So far, even the village child finds his village school environment foreign to his nature, to his interests, and to his needs. This environment has to be created by the child himself; then, and then only, can his natural interests and capacities be fully developed. From the child's natural interests, needs and capacities could be worked out activities and projects which would be connected with the child's own life and experiences. Activities of producing the necessities of life, food, clothing and shelter; of caring for the body, and the sanitation of the home and its surroundings; activities connected with marketing, transportation, exchange, communication; and activities connected with the co-operative and civic life of the village community, and of the larger community life of the

country, would be found very useful and practical in the rural primary schools.

City schools, teaching through projects, have to make a great effort in creating the necessary environment—almost everything has to be done artificially, and given to the children more or less as a second-hand experience. The villages offer no such difficulties. They have the materials right there, all round the children. If only the teachers were trained to use these materials their value would be found to be very great.

#### BUILDING THE VILLAGE SCHOOL AS A COMMUNITY CENTRE

Rural people in India do not live isolated from one another—not even the farmers whose farms may be at fairly long distances from the villages in which they live. They live in villages which vary in size from half-a-dozen hamlets to a couple of thousand souls.

As a rule different castes live in different quarters. Those belonging to the low castes usually have their quarters on the outskirts of the village. On account of caste restrictions and social customs there is practically no club life in an Indian village. People belonging to the same caste do meet occasionally in one another's homes, but these are mere social calls, and do not have the same objectives as do the social clubs in Western countries. For the people of the low castes the only place of meeting is the village liquor-shop, where, in the evenings after their day's work, they assemble, take a drink, and try to forget their fatigue and the worries of life. The only occasion on which people of the whole village, irrespective of caste, do meet is the village fair or festival, in which everybody takes part. Otherwise there is no place in an Indian village which can be called a community centre, where everybody can meet on common ground, not only for social purposes, but also for discussing the problems of the village, and for the educational and recreational activities which can be organized at such a centre.

Boys and girls, restricted by social customs, do not mingle with each other as they do in Western countries. They do not even attend the same school, although, indeed, there may not be a separate school for girls in the village. They have no clubs, as they have in Western countries. There is, however, a community life in each caste, and people are bound by religious ties to help each other in times of trouble and distress.

Common meeting-places for the people of a village are the weekly or bi-weekly market, where buying and selling take place, and where people of the same caste coming from different villages have an opportunity for social intercourse; the water-reservoirs and wells, where womenfolk go to bathe or to fetch water; and the temples, where people go to worship. In most cases, however, there are separate temples for the higher and the lower castes. Even at some of the great annual religious festivals the people of the low castes are not allowed admittance to certain parts of the temples. The people of these lower castes are now raising their voices in protest, and are demanding their rights with regard to worshipping at the temples, and bathing and taking water from the public reservoirs and wells. The indications are that it won't be long before social and religious justice is meted out to them.

The centre of the village government, which in the olden days was vested with the village Panchayat, whose members came from all the different castes, is now in Bengal, at the Zemindar's (landlord's) house; and his Kuchery (court-house) is the place from which the village is directly or indirectly governed. It is to this Kuchery that the tenants go to pay their rents; and even although in other matters the landlord has no power over them, in this respect he does exercise tremendous influence over the village people.

Under the old village Panchayat system, although the people had no community centre, they did have the village Samity (society or association). These Samities were composed of village aldermen, irrespective of caste and creed, who looked after the social activities of the village, both recreational and

cultural. In this way the village people banded themselves together for a common social and cultural life. This state of affairs existed in these villages at a time when they were enjoying prosperity and were more or less self-sufficient units. Now that the village life is broken and disintegrated the villages need much more co-operation in building up their social, economic and cultural life; but this co-operation has to be built along modern lines because of the changes that have come about in the villages since those days.

In the olden days, although nearly every village had its own school, these schools were not democratic institutions. They were exclusively for the children of the high-caste people, and the education was almost entirely religious. Things have changed since then; and although the low-caste people, on account of their poverty, are still unable to take advantage of the education that is available, they are not debarred from it as they were before.

The influence of Western civilization is bringing about a gradual change in social customs, even of the rural people. Most of these changes, however, are due indirectly to such agencies as railways, auto-buses, hospitals and schools. There has been very little direct effort to bring about social changes. To achieve any appreciable results very definite and active efforts will have to be made by the people themselves; the village people have to be united into common action for the common good.

Although apparently the village people are divided into numerous castes, the different communities have several things in common. It is these common factors which are ultimately going to bring them together:

1. Occupation. Nearly all the people of the villages are engaged directly or indirectly in agricultural pursuits.
2. Health. Nearly all of them are a prey to malaria and other prevalent diseases that are found in most of the Bengal villages.
3. Indebtedness. Nearly all of them are in debt, and are exploited by the middlemen.

These handicaps can be successfully fought only by the village people presenting a united front. Pain rather than joy brings people together. The suffering from common ailments tends to bring people together in a bond of sympathy.

Already the co-operative societies have done a great deal in uniting these people under one banner; and the landlords, the Brahmins and the untouchables have all learned to sit together as members of the village health association and other co-operative societies to discuss their common problems. All these changes have come about in the course of only a few years, and give one a glimpse of how the village autonomy can be revived and made the basis of national Swaraj. The establishment of a centre where the people can meet together on common ground, not only for discussing their social and economic problems, but for developing the village community life, morally, culturally and spiritually, is but the next step in this programme.

Briefly, then, the purposes of such a centre will be:

1. To provide a place where people of all castes and creeds can come together to discuss their common problems, social, economic and health.

2. To provide a place where they can culturally enrich the lives of the individuals as well as of the whole village, by organizing musical and dramatic performances, story-telling, lectures, exhibitions, etc.

3. To provide a centre for the social service work of the village.

4. To provide a meeting-place for men and women, boys and girls, all of whom will have their different societies, and who will contribute through them to the reconstruction of village life.

### *Building the Village School*

To follow the above programme a central meeting-place would be required. Under present conditions there is no place available in the village where people of all castes and

creeds can meet on common ground. In some of the villages, perhaps, the landlord's courtyard might be used, but that would not be a place belonging to the community. This community centre has to be the people's very own. Everyone in the village, rich or poor, high caste or low, will have to contribute to its construction, and in return will have equal right to its use.

The village school building would be the best place to be used for such purposes, but this is not to be found in most villages. The school buildings, the few that do exist, are of a most disreputable type—usually a small one-roomed house built of mud, with floor of earth and a thatched roof, and with little or no ventilation at all. It is dark, stuffy, gloomy and dull. There is a great need for better school buildings, but it would cost the Government millions to give to every village a respectable one. How, then, are we to have such buildings? The village people cannot build them at their own expense. This is quite evident from the fact that most of the people themselves have not even a decent mud hut to live in. Most of the landlords are not in a position to give such a building to their village; and even if they were, it would be against the principles of the village democracy and co-operation for the people to accept such a gift as a charity. The best and the only way that such buildings can be put up is by co-operative effort.

There is plenty of land belonging to the landlords lying waste in every village. For building a school which would also be a community centre these landlords could be induced to donate a portion of such lands, and such materials as may be found on their estate, especially timber.

Another source of contributions for the community building, as building memorials for the dead, has a very strong appeal to the sentiment of most people. Nothing could be more fitting or suitable than to build a school building as a memorial. It could serve many worthy purposes in the life of the community besides honouring the cherished memory of those who once

lived in the village. In practically all countries people spend far too much money on useless monuments to the dead. From the point of view of sentiment these expenditures, to a certain extent, may be justified. Even the Government spend vast sums of money on war and other memorials, most of which are not even artistic or attractive to look at. In Western countries people spend large sums of money not only on tombstones but also on flowers to put on these tombs. In India people spend lavishly on the funeral rites of the dead. Some of this money could be diverted to the creating of permanent and living memorials for the dead in the hearts of the people. Examples of such memorials are to be found everywhere, even in some parts of India. In the villages, however, there are very few memorials of this kind. One of the best examples of such diversion of money is in Stockholm, where a distinguished and public-spirited lady has started a movement to build institutions for the old and infirm residents of the city. From the money collected for this purpose, which would otherwise have been spent on flowers at funerals and weddings, a beautiful and well-equipped institution has been built in which the aged and infirm of the city are being housed and cared for. Similar movements could be started in India, especially in the rural areas. Everybody in the village could contribute something, either in kind or in cash. If required, some money could be borrowed from the local co-operative bank; or perhaps the co-operative society and the bank might contribute their share in putting up the building. To meet the balance the Government and the District Boards could come forward with their share of responsibility. This scheme is by no means a Utopian project; it could be worked out if people interested in the rural reconstruction and rural uplift would only take it up wholeheartedly and enlist the sympathy of the public and of the Government. Only through the co-operation of all the agencies could such a project be worked out to the satisfaction of all.

The plan of such a building need not be at all elaborate.

A couple of large rooms, with a wide verandah running all round, would serve the purpose. Or instead of two large rooms perhaps one main hall and a small room for keeping books and papers would be more suitable. These rural schools being one-teacher schools it is needless to have more than one large classroom. And since the building would be used for other purposes, it would be desirable to give as much space as possible to the hall. Functions which would attract the attendance of the whole village would, of course, be held in the open space provided in front of the building. Besides this space there would be sufficient land on all sides of the building for flower and vegetable gardens. The school would be the most attractive place in the whole village. With it as a model the people might learn to appreciate beauty in their own homes, and also learn how to raise vegetables and fruits that do not ordinarily grow in their fields.

This building, having been put up by the contribution and co-operation of every single person in the village, would be open to all, irrespective of caste or creed. The poor and the rich, the high caste and the low caste, all would have free access to it, and would be allowed to make free use of the facilities at hand.

As regards the general programme at this community centre, only such functions would be arranged as would be of interest to the whole village. There would be no exclusion of any class or caste. For special functions, however, it might be reserved for some particular caste. It would also be reserved for the use of women on certain days.

#### ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMUNITY CENTRE

The activities of the community centre may be divided into three groups:

1. Activities which are common to all—men, women and children.
2. Activities of adults—men and women.
3. Activities of boys and girls.

1. *Activities common to all the People.*—These would be based upon the common interests and needs of the village community as a whole. The whole village would take part in the music, drama, story-telling, lectures, reading of newspapers and discussions on various topics—social, political, economic, sanitary and cultural—and organizing exhibitions of village arts and crafts and agricultural products.

2. *Activities of Adults.*—The activities of the men would be confined largely to questions connected with the work of the village co-operative societies, which are not only increasing in number, but also in the range of their activities. These activities in general would be the establishment of rural co-operative banks, the improvement of health and sanitation, the improvement of agricultural methods and marketing of crops co-operatively, and the discussion of the social and economic problems of the village, with suggestions as to how to improve them.

The activities of women's societies have been fully discussed elsewhere. Once a week, or as often as they can, these societies would meet at this centre and carry out their programme of work for their own as well as for the welfare of the village. The school building would have certain advantages in having the women use it, for they would help to keep the place neat and tidy, and also plaster the mud floors (when they were not of cement) whenever required.

3. *Activities of Boys and Girls.*—The activities of the boys have been discussed in detail under Brati-Balaka (Scout) Organization. The programme of the organization of boys and girls would be based more or less upon the 4-H Clubs in America, with the necessary modifications according to local conditions.

The aims of these clubs would be the same as those of the 4-H Clubs, which are: (1) to help country boys and girls to improve rural, farm and home practices, and the social life of their own communities; (2) to show them the possibilities of rural life; (3) to aid those who so desire to become efficient

farmers (or artisans) and home-makers; and (4) to teach rural boys and girls how to make of themselves public-spirited, useful citizens and leaders in rural affairs.

Through these activities boys and girls of different castes would be brought more closely together through common interests. They would also be able to come in contact with some of the inspiring men and women of their own village, and from outside, who might be invited from time to time to their meetings.

As the name of the 4-H stands for Health, Hands, Head and Heart, they would learn to build up their bodies and their health through right living; they would train their hands to be useful, their minds to think clearly, and their hearts to be kind.

*Teacher's Place in the Community Centre.*—The person in charge of this centre would obviously be the village schoolmaster. He would be assisted and guided, however, by the village Samity, while the work of the different clubs and organizations would be carried on by their respective officers. But in all cases the teacher would be the directing force and guiding spirit behind all these organizations. It is not suggested here that the schoolmaster would do everything himself; such a policy would be fatal to the whole programme of rural reconstruction, and would not be in keeping with the spirit of co-operation. People have to learn to do things for themselves. We need not one but many leaders in a village—both men and women—and the opportunity should be given to every person, especially to the young folk, for initiative and leadership.

The teacher would also act as the connecting link between the village societies and the various outside organizations whose assistance he might call for from time to time. He would also invite such help as might be available in the village itself, for it is quite common to find well-educated old men who have retired from service and are only too eager to be of some assistance in the improvement of their village conditions.

Still another duty of the teacher as a leader of the community centre would be to bring about a better relationship among the people of the village. As time permits he would visit the different people in the evenings in their homes, discuss their problems with them, and help them with his advice and suggestions. He would also direct the activities of boys and girls, and assist them in planning out their programme. In all matters, then, the teacher would act as a guide, friend and philosopher to all who might need his assistance. Only then could he command the love, respect and leadership of everyone in the village.

If such a chain of centres were to be established throughout the rural areas in Bengal the village life would once more blossom forth, giving rise to a new culture and a new civilization. In order to achieve this we would take the best in Western civilization, at the same time retaining the best in our own. The activities of the school should have the closest possible connection with the rest of society, and all the activities of the school should be measured by communal results, and by the extent to which they have raised the cultural, social and economic level of the community to which the school belongs.

The ideal village is one in which a fuller living is possible for one and all; in which one class is not exploited by another; in which the people live for the good of the whole community; and in which people are happy and prosperous in material things, and rich in the spiritual and cultural side of life.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SCOUT MOVEMENT

THE Baden-Powell Scout Movement and numerous other movements have sprung up during recent years throughout the length and breadth of the country. Their number is so large and their activities so varied that it is not possible to enumerate them all. The strongest among them all is the Bharat Yuvak Sangha (Indian Youth Association), organized more or less under the auspices of the Indian National Congress. Most of the activities of these movements are confined to physical culture and social service, although some of them take some part in the political movement. Of all the indigenous movements the one named above is almost the only one which is more or less organized, with branches practically all over the country. It is still in its infancy, however, and in order to become a really national movement it has yet to organize itself in such a way that everyone may be able to join it.

There is great need for the co-ordination and co-operation of all these different movements, and their affiliation under one central organization, and it is hoped that before long all the indigenous youth movements in the different parts of the country will unite under one flag—not a political flag, but a flag of service to the country and to the world. Our youth have great responsibilities before them, especially in the reconstruction of the social and religious customs of the country. With so many different customs prevailing the country cannot possibly expect to make any progress without the help of our youth. The older generation, and especially those belonging to the higher castes, cannot be expected to understand the idea of giving service. They have been accustomed merely to receiving service from others. This idea of service is the very foundation on which the whole movement is to be built—service to their family, to their

village, and to their country. It is when the people come to understand this lesson of service that we can expect any hope for the regeneration of the country. It is during childhood and adolescence that they have to learn this idea. During their adult life some of these young people will be occupying important positions, others will be in business or will be just wage-earners; but they will all be filled with one idea, that of service.

A celebrated statesman has said: "Whatever ideas you wish to dominate a nation with must first be planted in the minds of growing boys." The object of the youth organizations should be, not only to have our growing young men and women enjoy life to the full in beautiful and healthy surroundings, but to have them dedicate their lives to the service of their country, and of the world as a whole. The hope for peace and better understanding lies not so much with the statesmen, scientists and generals as with our youth. They are going to decide the destinies of empires and kingdoms. But why our youth? Because theirs is a life of adventure, theirs is truly a dynamic life, and at no time in the history of the world has the need for adventure and sacrifice been greater than it is at the present day, when the whole world is in a turmoil, when from the platforms and pulpits peace is preached, but behind the curtains secret preparations are being made for war and destruction. Nationally and internationally, therefore, we need the services of our youth in this gigantic task of national freedom and world peace.

Many say that these young boys and girls ought to be at school and not meddle in politics. These same people, in time of war, would carry on active propaganda among the very young people for recruitment, and that would not be considered as meddling in politics; school would then be a matter of no importance. During the troublesome days in India the young men and women cannot stay shut up behind the four walls of their schools. The activities of the schools must be extended beyond the school buildings and the text-

books to actual life. The youth are going to demand this if it is not given to them. The ideas of democracy have spread like wildfire to the remotest parts of the globe. Science, through all the means of modern transportation—the radio, the wireless, etc.—has brought the world closer together than it ever was before. Students from the Orient have been going in larger and larger numbers to Western countries and returning to their own lands imbued with democratic ideas and ideals. These ideas and ideals have got to find outlet in some way or another. The ideas that these young men and women carry back with them are not political ideas only; they are social and religious as well. They see the social evils in their countries much more vividly than they saw them before. They have to break away from many of the time-honoured customs. But that is not all. They have to fire others with these ideas of “liberty,” “justice” and “fair play.”

To bring about a better understanding between the different peoples, especially between the East and the West, and towards Internationalism and World Peace, we have to point out to our young people the likenesses rather than the differences between the peoples of the East and the West. The older generation has done great harm by emphasizing the differences between the various races. Not only this—they have even gone so far as to insist that the white races are superior, and that all the other races are born to be subject to the white race. These people are responsible for the prejudice that is prevalent throughout the Western countries against the people of the Orient. All this ignorance and prejudice has got to be cleared away before we can achieve anything towards interracial understanding and friendship. In India the spirit of independence and self-respect is rigidly kept out of the minds of young boys. Those who have it are called haughty, indolent and undesirable. What is most urgently needed is the inculcation in the minds of our youth of a strong spirit of self-respect and confidence in themselves. The Oriental expression of respect and hospitality is often misunderstood

by foreigners; it is often taken for the slave mentality of the people. Probably there has been undue importance attached in their own society to respect for elders and for those socially and otherwise superior to them. The caste system also to a great extent is responsible for this. This too has to change; respect must be for "man," and not for any individual merely because of his official or social position. When the youth of India have this idea well in mind, then all the evils of caste will disappear; and through faith and confidence in themselves they will be instrumental in building up a New and Greater India, an India which will be a source of pride not only to the people of India but to the whole world.

The programme of activities of these movements has to be carefully drawn up and defined, and emphasis placed upon the most urgent needs of the country. The social problems should naturally be at the top of the list of their activities, for it is first the social problems that the youth have to fight before they can proceed with other activities in their programme.

They must have such objectives as will draw young men of all castes and creeds, and of different political opinions. Politically-minded young men (not political agitators) need not be excluded from the movement; nor should those who hold moderate views be kept out. These objectives should be quite comprehensive, to suit various types of individuals. The movement should have a banner of its own; it should not fly any political or religious flag, or one of any particular party or creed.

The objectives of the movement may be listed as follows:

1. To promote one's own health and that of one's own community.
2. To promote industry by providing training in some occupation, such as agriculture, cottage industries and other handicrafts, thereby improving the economic life of one's family and that of the community, and to teach the dignity of labour.
3. To foster a spirit of brotherhood and co-operation among the peoples of different castes and creeds, and to remove all race and caste disabilities, and the evils of caste and social distinctions.

4. To develop leadership.
5. To promote loyalty to the family, to the village, and to the country.
6. To remove all ignorance and foster knowledge, thereby opening the eyes of the people to the wider issues of life, and removing all superstitions and evils of social and religious customs.
7. To encourage the youths to dedicate their lives for "Service."

The organization of such an indigenous youth movement is by no means an easy task. There are numerous difficulties which have to be faced, chief among them being: (1) the unsympathetic attitude of the parents, due chiefly to caste and class prejudices; (2) the conflicting views and objectives of the various movements already in existence; and (3) the suspicions of the Government. If the movement, however, is going to have any power in the reorganization of the country, in the building up of a new social order, and in the removing of the evils which are a blot upon the country, our youth have to take a firm stand against all these and numerous other oppositions. The existing youth movements (in India) have no right to criticize the Baden-Powell Scout Movement for introducing its activities into India. They cannot be justified in doing so unless they are themselves prepared to overcome the weaknesses of the B.P.S. Movement. There has been too much talk in political circles about race prejudice and about the disadvantages under which Indians have to live as a result of these prejudices. It is not that these criticisms have no justification. The point is, that one can understand, to some extent, an alien and a ruling race possessed with the spirit of superiority not quite willingly accepting their subject races on equal terms. These ruling races have class distinctions among themselves, but these distinctions have to a great extent disappeared from the Western countries. The distinctions which do remain, however, are not the same as the distinctions of caste, and this the Youth Movement has to fight with all its strength.

India can hope to enjoy equality with the rest of the free nations of the world only after she has freed herself from all

social and religious differences—when nobody will be allowed to suffer on account of his birth in a certain caste, and when manual and even menial work will be given a place of honour with other respectable professions, and not be despised and looked down upon.

There are movements here and there which are trying to bring about social reforms and to do away with all caste barriers and other evil customs; but the progress so far has been extremely slow. Some people think that education will help to remove all these evils. But when we see the numbers of educated people, who are by no means few, nor their influence negligible, we find that they have achieved very little with regard to the removal of caste barriers. There may be other solutions, but certainly one of the most effective ways to solve these problems is through the organization of our youth. In Soviet Russia, for example, the Communist Youth Movement and the Pioneer Movement are strong instruments of the Communist Party in removing all class barriers and in carrying out effectively the programme of the Communist Party.

Lord Baden-Powell, when he framed the Scout Laws, must have had the guns of some of the conservative aristocrats levelled against him for preaching brotherhood and equality among all Scouts. The Scout Law says: "A Scout is a brother to all, and recognizes no class distinction." But he had the courage to face all opposition—he had the vision of a greater Empire, an Empire not built upon Imperialism and extension of possessions, but an Empire having as its citizens the young people of the whole world.

During recent years youth movements have sprung up in many countries, most of them as a revolt against the established authority of the old and conservative people. They have been to a great extent instruments in bringing about political, social and educational changes in their countries. In India, too, if similar changes are to be brought about, and the country is to march not only towards political freedom but towards

social and religious freedom, the youth of the country will have to organize themselves under one banner, with but one aim—that of brotherhood and of service to their country and to the whole world.

The Baden-Powell Scout Movement, for very obvious reasons, cannot achieve any such results so far as India is concerned. Its foreign character and its identity with the Government stand in the way of its success. The Youth Movement in India has to be headed by Indians themselves; it has to be Indian in character and Indian in spirit.

During these days of national awakening and political unrest many leaders are coming forward at great personal risk to preach the gospel of equality among all peoples, and to help to remove social barriers. And only when all these barriers have been removed will the people be able to enjoy social, political and religious freedom.

This indigenous Youth Movement is not to be a narrow nationalistic movement. It has to establish friendly ties with the Baden-Powell Scout Movement and with all the youth movements of the world.

Some time ago a challenging statement headed a poster used by a Boys' Movement in Canada, which presented the world-wide nature of their work:

“ The Kingdom of God has  
No Foreign Nation, No Foreign Boy.”

In making this statement the Canadian boys have shown the real spirit of the brotherhood of the Scout Movement. Will the Indian boys lag behind? They will if they cannot follow this motto; but before they can follow it they will first have to recognize equality of all the boys within the boundaries of their own country. Then only can they claim equality and brotherhood with the boys of the rest of the world.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE EDUCATION OF ADULTS

PHILOSOPHERS and educators have given numerous definitions of education. Many of them can be criticized as incomplete from the standpoint of others. But the best definition that covers everything is the one given by Professor Dewey—namely, that “Education is Life.” By “Life” he means everything that a person should have in life. A person cannot be said to have life if he is not able to enjoy good music, for instance, or if he is ignorant of the laws of sanitation and hygiene, or if he thinks his bodily wants are all that count in making him happy, or if he thinks that to have life one must kill all desires and seek salvation in meditation.

For our programme education would mean life in the fullest sense of the word—physically, spiritually, morally, intellectually, socially, economically, and from the point of view of clean, healthy living. When a person is living in the best possible way with regard to all these phases of life, then we can say that he has education. The second definition that comes nearest to our purpose is the one given by Comenius—namely, that “Education is the development of the whole man.” Since the development of the whole man goes on throughout life, his education also should continue throughout life. We have passed the stage when people believed that a person’s education was finished when he left school and entered life.

Adult education seeks to provide a development whereby a person may live happily and abundantly, not merely a life free from economic cares, nor one in which he may indulge in purely intellectual pursuits, nor even a life which may be purely spiritual—taking care of his own individual spiritual life without any thought of the material, moral and social welfare of himself and of those around him.

What seems to be wrong with most of our present-day

education is that it has not yet given due consideration to the social side of education; it has been too much individualistic, too much for individual advancement, and for competition of one person against another, or of one society against another. Some of the schools are introducing group activities and socializing their studies; but, while the school activities are socialized to a certain extent, they still tend to remain social activities of one class competing against another.

The purpose of education should be to take into consideration the development of the individual only as a means to the development of society.

It is the business of adult education to emphasize these social ends, and it is only by means of such an education that we can ever hope to solve not only the local problems (social, political and religious), but the problems of the larger society (the whole world). If only people would realize more fully how dependent the different countries and peoples are on one another, how the troubles in one country affect other countries! It is adult education therefore which, to a great extent, is going to solve most of the present-day problems, if only it is carried on along the right lines.

In spite of the fact that educators are clamouring for education not to cease at the termination of one's school or college career, but to continue throughout life, the great majority, even of those few who do continue their education in later life, do so only in their own particular lines of interest, and therefore do not get an all-round education. This affects not only their own individual development but also the development of society.

Throughout the world there are movements afoot with regard to this question of adult education. Some countries have definite organizations to carry out this work among the urban as well as the rural communities. Even in countries in which there is no problem of illiteracy the programme of adult education is as strong as it is in countries which have to face the problem of illiteracy. People are coming to realize

more and more that, in order to live a happy, prosperous and contented life, one has to keep in touch with what is going on round him in the rest of the world.

In a country like India, in which there is such a high percentage of illiteracy, the programme has to be arranged in a somewhat different way. As a matter of fact, we cannot lay down one programme to suit all people. It has to be arranged to meet the needs of a variety of people belonging to different social conditions and to different cultures. And yet we must have a minimum goal. This minimum goal is a certain standard from the standpoint of sanitation, food, clothing and social customs. In the following pages an attempt has been made to offer a few suggestions with regard to this programme of adult education in rural India. It is by no means an exhaustive programme, nor is it expected to meet the needs of all parts of India; but these few suggestions would help to bring about the desired results if applied through the co-operation of the Government, of the non-official agencies, and of the people concerned.

• That there is urgent need for adult education in India, as in any other country, nobody can deny. But, unlike the situation in most Western countries, in India there is need not only for adult education (taking "education" in its broad sense, and taking for granted that the adults are at least literate), but also for bringing about the literacy of millions of adults. The programme, then, will have to be at least of three kinds:

1. To meet the problem of illiteracy, at the same time providing an education which does not necessarily involve the three R's, as, for example, education in citizenship, in health and sanitation, in co-operation, in village self-government, and in improving social and religious customs.

2. To promote adult education in the broad sense of the term without attempting to solve the problem of removing illiteracy.

3. To retain the literacy of the people, at the same time providing adult education as mentioned in 1.

*History of Adult Education in India*

Although not called by this name, adult education has existed in India from very ancient days—from the time when the art of writing was yet unknown. Ancient education in India was in terms of community needs; its objective was to fit a man to be a member of such a community. To-day the objective is virtually the same, but the complexities of modern community life make the attaining of this objective difficult.

In India, perhaps as in no other country, literacy was considered of very little importance as against real education, which does not necessarily require literacy. How ancient literature, philosophy, religion, art and other sciences had developed so highly long before the art of writing came to be known, and how all these branches of learning were handed down from one generation to another, is still a marvel, especially to Western people. Even to-day there are to be found numerous religious mendicants who cannot read or write, but who can expound some of the deepest philosophies of the Hindu religion, while others can compose beautiful hymns and sing them to tunes set by themselves. In fine arts too there are people who can carve in marble and wood most artistic objects without having learned even the rudiments of drawing or geometry, while the fresco-paintings of some people who, again, are utterly illiterate invite the attention and admiration of the greatest artists. Illiterate peasants show wonderful knowledge of their religion, folk-lore and epics. It is an admitted fact, therefore, that adult education is entirely in accord with the genius of the people.

*Agencies which have been responsible for this kind of Adult Education*

*Village Bards or Minstrels.*—These put into verse the history of the village and of all the important families, especially the royal families, tracing their history from the very beginning,

and extolling their virtues, and the great and noble deeds which individuals in these families performed, in times of both peace and war. These bards and minstrels, when they recited the thrilling episodes and the great and noble deeds of people in the remote past, aroused the emotions and sentiments of their hearers, who wanted to become as brave, noble and courageous as their ancestors. The people learned not only the history of their own villages, but also that of the great heroes, rulers and public men of their country. These episodes were not recited in a dry fashion, as our history text-books give them, but in a manner so fascinating that they caught the interest and imagination of the people, who could never forget them. In most instances these bards and minstrels were employed at royal courts, and patronized by them. Only on special occasions were they expected to recount their stories and sing their songs before the royal courts. At other times they were free to go about in the surrounding villages and tell their stories and sing their songs before the general public. They did not know how to read or write, but they could compose new verses and sing them in praise of anybody who had earned a name by his deeds of public service. There were no newspapers then; and even if there had been the great mass of the people could not have read them. There was no chance for the philanthropic and heroic deeds of the people to become known except through these bards. The oppressors and evildoers were afraid of them, because they would not hesitate to make their deeds known to the people, and so ruin their prestige.

*Kathakas (Story-tellers).*—Instruction in religious, civic and social branches was given by professional men called Kathakas (story-tellers). Most of these men could read and write, and sometimes were well versed in Sanskrit and the vernacular literature. Some of them are still to be found. They are sometimes invited by different villages on special occasions, usually at some festival, and nearly all the villagers contribute towards their fees. These Kathakas recite

from memory, and sometimes read from books, religious stories and epic poems. They also deliver discourses on questions pertaining to civic, social and other matters. Since most people are at work during the day, these recitals are given at night, and practically the whole village—men, women and children—turns out to listen to them. The meetings are held in the courtyard of some wealthy person in the village, or under a Shamiana (canopy) especially erected for the purpose, or under the open sky. The people may sit up all night, sometimes two or three nights in succession. Through these recitals they learn more about religious, social and other matters than they could through books.

*Kirtans (Religious Operas).*—Through these Kirtans the stories of Radha and Krishna and of other deities are chanted, and the mass of the people, although totally illiterate, learn them by heart. Nowadays, because of the breakdown of the old culture by the introduction of the present system of Western education, thousands of youths have forgotten the stories about their own religion. The few who know them have learned them not at schools and colleges but at home, or through these Kirtans in the villages.

Through these agencies, then, the folk-lore, legends, ballads, epics, ethical texts and devotional hymns of high merit and beauty through all these generations have been handed down from father to son, from mother to daughter, from the minstrels, bards and Kirtan singers to the millions of illiterates without the aid of reading and writing.

*Theatre.*—It is only of late that the stage in India has degenerated. The history of Indian drama has a very brilliant record of high literary achievement. The people of Bengal especially have a particular taste for acting. Some of the best dramas have not yet been translated into European languages, and therefore have not come to the notice of the Western public. In Bengal the dramas of Bankim Chandra Chatterji and of Rabindranath Tagore have revolutionized the tone of the Indian stage. The famous drama of Bankim Chandra, *Ananda*

*Matha*, although not revolutionary in character, but patriotic in tone, has been proscribed by the Government. It is therefore extremely difficult, under the present conditions, to do anything instructive, creative and uplifting without being suspected of encouraging sedition. The nationalist leaders, no matter what field they may be engaged in—even that of purely social and educational work—are always under suspicion; their work is always hampered, and at times they are even harassed. But to return to the subject of the theatre as a means of adult education—there are in Bengal semi-religious and secular dramas called *Jatra*. The people are very fond of theatres, and even in the villages some dramatic talent is found. Some of the villagers have organized *Jatra* parties, composed of amateur actors; and during certain seasons they go about giving their performances in different villages. The standard of their acting is not very high, but considering the scanty opportunities they have had, and their limited education and training in the histrionic art, they deserve more credit than criticism. Poor economic conditions and lack of proper education have handicapped the development of histrionic art in the villages. There is plenty of room for its advancement and revival in the light of modern conditions.

*The Weekly Market.*—The weekly or bi-weekly market is another very ancient institution in India. These markets are held only in villages of a certain size and importance. They are not only centres where people come to sell their produce and buy their requirements, but they are also centres for meeting friends from other villages and for providing recreational facilities. At these markets one finds people coming from great distances in order to buy a trifling article which could easily have been purchased for them by a neighbour or some other member of the family. The children too are loath to stay behind; and unless they have to look after the cattle, or have some other important duty at home, they willingly walk miles with their parents merely to go to market. Here in one

corner one may find a juggler giving his performances in the open, to the utter amazement and amusement of the people; in another corner may be seen a snake-charmer, or a man with a trained bear and a monkey or a goat, giving performances, and just passing their plates round or spreading a piece of cloth on to which the people may throw a pice or two. In another place a quack doctor, with all his herbs and medicines spread out, may be extolling their efficacy in various diseases. The town courier may be announcing some new law or ruling that has recently been passed. Attracted by the great variety of interesting things in these markets, people can spend all their leisure wandering from booth to booth.

At these markets a very profitable and well-organized programme of adult education could be carried out. Why should the poor farmer be eternally exploited by the landlord and the middleman, and by the moneylenders? Why should he not have access to all that science has achieved in the field of agriculture? Why should he eternally live in poverty, in ill-health and in the midst of unhealthy surroundings, when Nature has provided him with the beauties of the countryside? It would take a long time to wipe out illiteracy entirely from the country. There are resources, however, both official and non-official, which could be organized under one banner to help in this great work of adult education. The Government official (Circle Officer) is never too busy, but he is quite satisfied with his routine work and with the sending out of reports, as are many other officers in different departments, who incidentally perform a certain number of duties only so far as their routine work is concerned. These Government officers could render valuable services to the people if they would visit these markets, and by means of lectures and demonstrations contribute something towards educating the masses. The Agricultural Officer, for instance, could plan his itinerary in such a way as to visit these markets a number of times during the year and advise the farmers as to the selection of seeds, and where they might be obtained; the use and

conservation of manure; the growing of leguminous crops and the ploughing of them under to enrich the soil; the growing of catch-crops; the raising of poultry, and other allied industries to supplement their income; and the various pests which destroy the crops and cause considerable damage. The Veterinary Officer, in the same way, could bring along with him a few medicines for cattle diseases, give the farmers talks on the prevention of various cattle diseases and epidemics, and on the question of breeding and raising of good stock, upon which depends the success of all farming operations. The Inspector of the Co-operative Societies in his turn could help the people with their credit system, teach them how to free themselves from the clutches of the moneylenders, and how to get loans at a much lower rate of interest by joining the co-operative societies. He could also show them the advantages of depositing their money with the Co-operative Banks, and in many ways he could give the people ideas about the proper ways of saving and spending their money. He could explain to them the futility of extravagantly spending their money on marriage and death ceremonies, and thus getting into debt which they can never get rid of. He could also discuss with them the question of co-operative purchasing and marketing, and the benefits accruing from them. The local doctor in charge of the public health work, instead of merely sitting in his dispensary and doling out medicines to the patients, could render a much better service if he would set up a booth at these markets, and not only serve his patients with curative medicines, but by means of charts and pictures tell the people what they should do in order to keep off malaria and other preventable diseases. He could also tell them about personal hygiene and village sanitation. Similarly the local Educational Officer would do well in the field of education if, in addition to making his weekly purchases at the market, he would have a little corner where he could display some charts showing the advantages of literacy and of going to school. Children, and even adults, are fond of pictures; and if suitable

picture-books were displayed the children who come to these markets might like to purchase them. This would give them an incentive to learn to read and write. On holidays at the local school the teachers and the students could be utilized to help in this programme. There are always many young men, keen to do such public service, who could be called upon to help in whatever way they could at these markets. What is really needed is leadership, organization and the co-operation of all the different agencies and their resources. The Government officials after all are public servants, and if they would only realize this, and change their attitude from that of a master to that of a servant, nothing is impossible in the field of adult education in rural India.

*The Village Fairs.*—India is a country of fairs and festivals. There is hardly a month in which there is not a fair in some village or other. These fairs attract thousands of people from the surrounding neighbourhood. They last from one to three days, and offer enormous opportunities which have not yet been made use of. By means of a well-organized and systematic programme, and with the co-operation of the official and non-official bodies, a very valuable piece of educational work could be done at these fairs. In the district of Birbhum, in which is located Tagore's Institute of Rural Reconstruction, one of the biggest fairs is held on the banks of a river. Here people come from all over the province, and some even from outside the province. During the five days of the fair over a hundred thousand people visit this place. Members of the staff of the Institute and students and young men from the neighbouring town have visited this fair for the last eight years. They carry their tents and all the equipment for cooking their meals. They look after the sanitation of the whole area, and see that the water of the river is not polluted; they go round the fair area every morning and clean up the whole place; they protect the women from molestation; and altogether they keep order and render any service which they may be called upon to do. In the evenings lantern lectures on malaria and other

preventable diseases, and on social and economic questions, are given. There is ample opportunity for a number of other activities all leading to adult education of both men and women, but so far very little has been attempted. If the Government would only co-operate a little more fully and send officers representing the different departments, placing them all under the charge of a recognized non-official body, such an agency would become a very powerful force in the programme of adult education at these village fairs.

As matters stand, however, there is little or no co-ordination of the activities of the various departments of the Government. Consequently there is not only a waste of money but also many complications and much red tape in carrying out any project.

In the districts, in addition to the police and the civil officials under the local government, there are the officers belonging to the various departments, each officer more or less going his own way, and not knowing, nor caring to know, what the other is doing.

A private institution like Sriniketan, which is attempting to help the villages in solving their agricultural, industrial (cottage industries), health, sanitary and social problems, should be receiving much more aid from the Government than it has hitherto received. The Directors of Public Instruction, Public Health, Agriculture and Industries have all visited the Institute, some of them more than once. Even the Governor of the province and the Viceroy have come, and gone away well pleased with the work that is being done. Some of the Directors have made grants from their departments, but these grants are very small compared with the amount spent by the Institute itself, and it is hoped that more grants will be forthcoming in order to extend the activities of the Institute still further. It is within the powers of these Directors to give grants to private institutions, both for capital and recurring expenditure. The Director of Public Instruction, for example, is ordinarily empowered to make a grant equal to the amount contributed from private sources.

In almost every province there is an agricultural college, which, in addition to giving agricultural education leading to a degree, carries on a certain amount of research work. In addition to these colleges there are a few centres for the whole of India where research in various branches of agricultural science is carried on. There being no system of Extension Service, however, the results of these researches never reach the farmers. Most of them are published in agricultural journals in English, and a few are translated into the vernaculars; but the farmers, even though they may be literate, hardly ever receive copies of these pamphlets. The work of Extension Service, through popular lectures and demonstrations from village to village, so far has been totally neglected.

Of late, however, some of the provinces have started demonstration trains, in which some of these departments have co-operated. They have fitted a railway carriage with all kinds of charts, pictures and exhibits, and have been visiting villages along the railway lines, halting at each place for a day or so and giving lectures and demonstrations on co-operation, agriculture, sanitation and hygiene. These demonstration trains cover a very small portion of the province, however, and do not reach the villages in the interior. They run for only a month or so in the year, and therefore cannot be expected to achieve much. Yet it is a good beginning, and if further developed will have far-reaching results. Such demonstrations could be organized also at the village fairs, and the services of all the district officers representing the various departments utilized for the purpose.

### *Adult Education through Exhibitions*

In Bengal, as well as in practically all the other provinces, agricultural and industrial exhibitions are held annually in almost every district. The primary aim of these exhibitions is to extend to the village people some knowledge of cottage

industries and improved methods of agriculture by means of demonstrations, models, charts and pictures, and through lectures. The attainment of this aim is difficult, however, on account of the way in which these exhibitions are organized and conducted. Villagers come from great distances to the exhibitions, some to sell their wares, others to buy a few things—maybe a few trinkets—while most of them come for mere fun. So far as the cottage industries are concerned, the local artisans seldom receive any recognition or encouragement, since all the prizes and awards are given to the shopkeepers, who bring manufactured articles from other places. Most of those who are appointed judges do not know what they are judging, nor do they know how to judge. They are usually the local *élite* and petty Government officials. The local (district) Agricultural Officer brings some unusually large specimens of vegetables and other farm crops, not necessarily from the Government farm. The judges are his friends, and he carries away nearly all the prizes. The Institute of Rural Reconstruction used to send specimens of garden and farm crops and products from the industries department. For some years we were awarded prizes and certificates for these exhibits—and rightly, too. The result was that practically none of the local cultivators and artisans could compete with our exhibits. A representative of the Institute caused a considerable amount of misunderstanding one year when he requested the Exhibition Committee not to award the Institute any certificates or medals, but to give them instead to the local cultivators and artisans, in order to give them encouragement.

The recreational programme at these exhibitions is by no means of a high order. The amusements not only lack educational value, but in many cases they are very suggestive, and are harmful to the morality of the village folk, who in general are much cleaner morally than the city people.

These exhibitions, if they were properly organized in full co-operation with the private social service organizations, and if they made full use of Government agencies, could be

very beneficial to the rural population. If, instead of cheap dramatic performances, short plays were written and staged, showing on the one hand the evils of the caste system, the evils of drink, and the waste of money on marriages, funerals and other religious ceremonies, and on the other hand the advantages of co-operation, sanitation and preventive measures against malaria and other epidemics, more good would be accomplished than by any amount of lecturing on these subjects. By means of educational films picturing the reconstruction work in other countries, and the contrast between the Indian villages and the villages of these countries, the people would be awakened from their sleep and roused to some action. Once the minds of the people are stirred very little outside aid will be required. The people will then be ambitious to do these things for themselves, and will not always look to charitable agencies. Before anything definite is accomplished, however, the village folk will have to take a different attitude towards all phases of life—the body, the spirit and the mind; recreation, art, music, religion, festivals, social amenities, better clothes, more hygienic dwellings and villages, the desire for more abundant life, for a higher standard of living. All this will have to be brought about through adult education. As Sir M. Visvesvaraya says:

The task . . . is of appalling difficulty and magnitude, but unless we believe that it is capable of accomplishment we shall be driven to accept the pessimistic conclusion of a Western writer that India is "the dying East." This conclusion, assuredly, every Indian will repudiate. A consciousness should be roused in the Indian mind that a better state of things could be brought into existence in India itself if the people only willed and worked for the same.<sup>1</sup>

It is not the task of the people only, nor is it the duty of the Government alone. We need the co-operation of both, including the universities. When these three agencies—the People, the State and the Universities—combine together, with a determination and one single cause, there is not the

<sup>1</sup> Sir M. Visvesvaraya, *Reconstructing India*, p. 326.

slightest doubt that even in India adult education will make rapid strides. So far, the universities have kept themselves quite aloof from this programme. What little has been done, and is being done, is through private agencies and by the Government. Very often private institutions are suspected by the Government, and so have constantly to meet its opposition. But nothing can be achieved unless and until both work in absolute harmony and co-operation with each other, with perfect understanding and mutual trust.

The willingness of the masses to follow the leadership of the *literati* is one of the ancient heritages of India which needs to be conserved and made use of. It can be conserved now only if the *literati*, like their predecessors, deserve the leadership bestowed upon them. In India knowledge was ever conceived as a responsibility demanded by "dharma," and never as a means for carrying out selfish purposes. This responsibility still to some extent abides with the people, and it should drive them to fit themselves adequately for suitable service to the present generation. It is the people of India that have to do her reconstruction, and it is the educated among them who have to take the lead. It is her own universities that have to provide expert research and scientific guidance. But, when all is said and done, State aid is indispensable. And yet, in giving this aid, the State is not doing the people a favour. It is only her duty to play her rôle in the programme of adult education.

### *The University Extension Service*

Another agency which might be called upon to help in the work of adult education is the University Extension Service. This has yet to be organized.

Perhaps it is not exaggeration to say that of all the universities in the world Indian universities enjoy the largest number of holidays and vacations. It is the students who are the losers, both from the point of view of their studies and from the point of view of the fees they pay. Their one aim is to pass the

examinations, and they are happy to have as many holidays as possible. The professors, too, enjoy these holidays and vacations with full benefit of their salaries. Most of them do not even try to improve their knowledge during these vacations. There is no system of summer schools for those who wish to further their education, but who have no chance to do so during the academic year. Even the training colleges do not hold summer schools. And there is a dearth of trained teachers in every province. Even though some have had some professional training it is not of a high order. In large cities in which there may be hundreds of teachers and a training college no provision is made for evening classes for those teachers who are in service and who are eager for some professional training. The training given to the rural primary school teachers is of a very elementary character, and no arrangement is made to provide them with the advantages of summer schools or short courses. It is not within the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail what these training institutions could do for adult education. It would mean the entire reorganization of the Educational Department, and changes in Government are very slow, especially in the Government of India. It is up to the public, and to the public and private institutions, to organize such an educational system. Again, the Institute of Rural Reconstruction is fully equipped to offer training to the village teachers and to village community leaders in all phases of adult education. Already something has been done by means of lectures and through the organization of Brati-Balakas. In Bengal there are nearly sixty colleges, besides hundreds of high schools. If some of the professors and college students and teachers from these high schools were to give a month of their summer vacations to visiting the different villages in the province, under an organized association for the education of adults, the results achieved in a few years would be enormous. The professors, teachers and students would themselves be greatly benefited by these trips. They would be able to study at first-hand the

social, economic, historic and religious conditions of their own country. There is yet plenty of unexplored ground for research to be done in the remote villages. It is left to the people of the country themselves to take up this important work, for they and they alone can do it effectively and well.

### *Training of Workers in Adult Education*

In rural areas the only people who could take charge of this work, besides utilizing the forces already mentioned, are the village teachers. In Bengal, for instance, the Institute of Rural Reconstruction at Sriniketan might be used as a training centre. It is a matter of regret that all its resources have not yet been fully made use of. Through the co-operation of the District Board and the Department of Public Instruction arrangements could be made whereby village teachers might be sent to attend short courses. And, in order that the village schools might not suffer, a few extra teachers could be employed, who would work as substitutes while these teachers were receiving their training. In this way short courses could be given to groups of teachers throughout the year. After these teachers had their training in the different branches the various departments of the Government might contribute an additional allowance towards their salaries and cut down the number of their respective officers in the districts.

In the same way the village dāis also could be trained at the Institute. The Government could later insist upon the village dāis possessing a certificate before being allowed to practise.

### *Rural Libraries in the Programme of Adult Education*

The age is long past and gone when the only way people could learn history and about the lives of great men, or about religion, was by means of wandering bards, minstrels or storytellers. These people did supply a great need, but only the need of a particular period. The world has changed

considerably since those days, and those means of spreading knowledge are not sufficient for the needs of the present age. People even in the most civilized countries still gain a certain amount of knowledge by listening to lectures. We cannot altogether do away with the human touch, and although only a few people can take advantage of such lectures, those who do have such opportunities gain the advantage of personal contact with the lecturers. But to reach the great mass of people, not by living authors alone but by those who are long dead and gone, and in all the languages of the world, and on all different subjects, is impossible. The only possible way to learn from them and of them is by means of books. For this purpose we have libraries, where records of the deeds, achievements and thoughts of people, both living and dead, are carefully preserved for the benefit of our generation and of those to come.

There is no library service movement in British India. The Indian native state of Baroda is about the only state in the British and the native states in India which has a satisfactory library system, not only for the cities but also for the villages. His Highness the Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwar of Baroda is a pioneer in the popular library movement in India, Baroda state being the first and the only one in the country to establish State-aided, free public libraries.

Concerning libraries the Maharaja, in his speech at the opening ceremony of the Marathi Granth Sangrahalaya, a Marathi library at Bombay, on 7th November 1912, said:

The school teaches the boy to read, that he may know what men are doing and what they are thinking; it imparts certain rudiments of knowledge, that he may begin his life a little better prepared to meet the problems and the trials of that life than his father was before him. The college takes the selected few still further in the acquisition of the knowledge that has been gained by the slow and the painful work of former generations. It teaches the youth to reason, that he may distinguish right from wrong actions, right methods from wrong methods. It teaches him how to apply his reasoning powers to the larger affairs of life.

But although the school may start him in his life's work, and the

college carry him still further on, neither school nor college can take him to the end. To whatever end may be within the measure of his capacity, to that end he must strive himself. To reach that end he may mix with men of affairs, of the small though important affairs of the world. Or he may choose to cast his lot with the philosophers, with the thinkers of the age. But whether his mind inclines him to action or to meditation he must first enrol himself as a pupil in "the people's university"—the library. He must saturate his mind with knowledge of the deeds of other men, that he may emulate them. He must study the thought of others, that from the basis of those thoughts he may rise to still higher flights.<sup>1</sup>

Even the high school libraries in Indian schools are extremely poor, and the name of library in rural schools is practically unknown; even very few towns and cities have public libraries. It is a movement well worth the attention of the Government, the Municipalities, the District and Union Boards, and of the public.

It has been estimated that between Classes I. and II. of the primary schools 66 per cent. of the pupils dropped off in 1926; another 7 per cent. between Classes II. and III.; 7 per cent. between III. and IV.; 8 per cent. between IV. and V. No more than 12 per cent. ultimately reach a state of literacy at the age of eleven years, and many of these relapse into illiteracy on leaving school through lack of opportunity for using the art which they have painfully acquired. Between 37 and 45 per cent. of the children who go to the primary school leave the school before they have learned to read.<sup>2</sup>

One of the ways to keep up the literacy of the people who have learned to read is by means of libraries. Here, again, it is easy to put the whole responsibility upon the Government or upon the District Boards to supply libraries for the thousands of villages. The time will come when the Government will interest itself in such a movement. For the present it is the public who have to start such libraries. In many villages in Bengal public-spirited young men, through their own efforts, have built up small libraries for their villages. They

<sup>1</sup> N. M. Dutt, *Baroda and its Libraries*, pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

<sup>2</sup> *Seventh Quinquennial Review (India)*, vol. i., p. 122.

have not only themselves subscribed, but have raised funds by giving charity plays and by interesting philanthropists in their work. There are numerous ways and means by which sufficient money can be raised in every village to start the nucleus of a library. Later on, by inviting the co-operation and help of philanthropists, of District Boards, and even of the Government, they can develop these libraries. But the initiative must come from the village people themselves. It is the duty of the educated young men in the villages to take up this work. The village people are hungering for knowledge, for the ability to read; and when they cannot themselves read they flock round people who might read to them, perhaps a story from some book or current news from the papers. A great service could be rendered in this way to the millions of illiterates. They are anxious to know what is going on around them and in the outside world, of which they are totally ignorant. They need to be told stories of modern science and what it has done for the Western world. They need to be taken out of their shells and given the fresh air of the outside world.

*Literature for Adult Education.*—There is at present no literature that meets the needs and demands of adult education.

Literature is one of the most important means of adult education; yet while it has its cultural side, it has its evil side also. The cheap literature that falls into the hands of the people often has a very demoralizing influence upon them. Even in some of the most civilized and progressive countries we find that the kind of literature that gains most favour with the general public is not always of a very high order, either from the literary or from the moral point of view. This kind of literature cannot but have a demoralizing influence, which a better type of literature must help to counteract.

The mentality of the great mass of people in most countries is such that they indulge more readily in stories which appeal to the lower self rather than in stories which deal with the higher things of life. Stories of travel, of noble and heroic deeds and adventure, however, appeal to most people.

Promoters of adult education, therefore, have a great responsibility in the production of the right kind of literature at as reasonable a price as possible. They have a still more difficult task in suppressing all kinds of trash and rubbish, which not only are demoralizing in their effect, but which keep the people ignorant and superstitious, and which create antagonism and bitterness among people of different religions.

Religious subjects, so far as they tend to indoctrinate and deepen the gulf between the different religious groups, should be kept out; and if religious stories are included at all in this literature they should be selected from all the great religions, in order to show to the people that, after all, fundamentally all religions are the same.

Translations from foreign literature also should be made, in order that the people might know how other countries are making progress, and enjoying freedom and prosperity. A serious effort should be made, by means of literature, to remove all superstition, corruption and social evils.

There are certain religious organizations which seem to take delight in making fun of other religions, and belittling their gods and prophets; they even put out a number of booklets and pamphlets, which are sold by thousands. Some arrangement might be made whereby publishers of all such books could come to an understanding, and once and for all stop such nasty publications. They might better spend their time and energy on books which are not only useful, but which would bring the people of different religions together in better understanding and toleration. Such books would promote more unity and better fellowship, not only among the people of India but among the people of the whole world.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It can well be said that there are quite a number of agencies in the rural districts which can be used to advantage for adult education. Some of these agencies are entirely out of date,

and will not be found of much educative value under the present-day conditions; others have nearly disappeared. The minstrels and bards, for example, are very rarely to be seen in the villages, and even when they do put in an appearance they are resorted to more for amusement than for the purpose of education. The story-tellers likewise do not meet the real requirements of the people to solve their most pressing problems. Epics and stories from old literature do have a certain amount of value, but unless they are linked up with our own age they are more likely to keep the people living in their "glorious past," and not pull them out of their present plight.

The Kirtan singers (religious opera singers) too have not kept up with the rapidly changing conditions. All these institutions of the past have contributed to the general culture of the people, but so far as their educational contribution to-day is concerned they have very little to offer.

With regard to dramas and theatres there are quite a few playwrights to be found in Bengal. Some of them could turn their attention to the social, religious, sanitary and economic problems, and write short plays dealing with these subjects, which could be staged by the village people themselves in all the villages in Bengal. They would contribute enormously to the breaking down of some of the social evils and to enlightening the people in regard to better ways of living.

The weekly market, the village fairs and the exhibitions could be places at which people not only would do the buying and selling of things, perform religious worship, and be entertained, but places at which they will find out how to combat malaria and other epidemics, how to make their crops grow better, and the causes which are responsible for their ill-health and poverty, and which to a certain extent they themselves can remedy.

## CHAPTER X

### THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

WHILE about 10 per cent. of the boys and men in India can read and write, the literacy among women is just a little over 1 per cent. These are astounding figures; but this does not necessarily mean that all the rest who are illiterate are devoid of education. There is plenty of evidence to prove that among the millions of women in India who remain in seclusion, hardly ever going out in public, and who can neither read nor write, there is to be found a culture based upon the sacred books and tradition which gives them the finest qualities of judgment and personality. The question of illiteracy, however, cannot be dismissed with the above argument; for there are at the same time millions who are living in gross ignorance and superstition. Literacy among women is increasing very rapidly, as is shown by women's universities, colleges and lower schools. During recent years the education of women in all provinces in India has received the attention of even the most orthodox people, and the number of high school and college graduates is increasing every year.

In the villages, however, the education of women and girls has been almost totally neglected. This is due partly to the fact that village people are more conservative and orthodox, and would not send their girls to the boys' school even if one existed in the village. To establish separate schools for girls would involve enormous cost; but the need is so urgent that while the work of rural reconstruction and the reawakening of the rural areas is being carried on the question of women's education cannot be laid aside.

The need for women's education is far too evident to require any explanation. It is the mother who brings up the children; it is she who feeds and clothes them and looks after them; it is she who tells them stories at the fireside or while she is cooking the meal, with the children sitting round her and

helping her with odd jobs. The West has fully recognized the place of women in the education of children.. What the West is to-day is largely due to the part women have played as mothers, teachers and governesses. The early impressions made in the home cannot easily be erased. If India is ever going to stand on equality with the Western nations she too has to educate her women, who in their turn will educate their children, both in the homes and in the schools.

Mr R. C. Dutt, in his book, *A History of Civilization in Ancient India*, writes about the position of women in ancient India the following:

We have seen that the absolute seclusion of women was unknown in ancient India. Hindu women held an honoured place from the dawn of Hindu civilization, four thousand years ago; they inherited and possessed property; they took a share in sacrifices and religious duties; they attended great assemblies on State occasions; they often distinguished themselves in science and the learning of their times. And they even had their legitimate influence on politics and administration. Considered as the intellectual companions of their husbands, as their friends and loving helpers in the journey of life, as partners of their religious duties, and the centre of their domestic bliss, Hindu wives were honoured and respected in ancient times.

And again :

We saw in our account of the Epic period that ladies sometimes devoted themselves to the pursuit of philosophy, that Gargi Vacakanavi distinguished herself among the learned men of the Court of Janaka.<sup>1</sup>

From these and numerous other sources we learn that the women of India, in the remote past, enjoyed equal education, enlightenment, freedom, and an honoured position in society, and were not subjected to the forced submission, seclusion and ignorance that has been their lot for the past few centuries. They are again claiming their rightful heritage; and it will not be long before they are going to have it.

The women were receiving some kind of education even at the time the British came into India, as is shown in the report of the (British) Education Commission:

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Dutt, *A History of Civilization in Ancient India*, vol. i.

Apart from the Sanskrit traditions of women of learning and literary merit in prehistoric and mediæval times, there can be no doubt that, when the British obtained possession of the country, a section of the female population was educated up to the modest requirements of household life. In certain provinces little girls occasionally attended the indigenous village schools and learned the same lessons as their brothers. Many women of the upper class had their minds stored with the legends of the Puranas and Epic poems, which supply impressive lessons in morality, and in India form the substitute for history. Among the lower orders the keeping of the daily accounts fell in some households to the mother or chief female of the family.

The Commission further goes on to say that:

. . . the intellectual activity of Indian women is very keen, and it seems frequently to last longer in life than the mental energies of the men. The intelligence of Indian women is certainly far in advance of their opportunities of obtaining school instruction, and promises well for their education in the future.

And yet, in the face of these facts, we find that little or nothing has been done for the education of women in India, although that is really the keynote to the country's progress, socially, economically and politically. The removal of the purdah, the prevention of high infant mortality and of child marriage, and the proper care of children can be achieved only if the women are properly educated. The spirit of the Indian women has not altogether died out. In the past they took an active part in the social, economic and political development of the country, and, to a certain extent, are doing so to-day. Mahatma Gandhi, when he came out of prison in 1931, paid a very high tribute to the women of India. It was the women who had been active during the recent political disturbances in India; it was the women who had been picketing liquor-shops; it was the women who had come forward and addressed public meetings and taken part in the activities in the struggle for independence. But women of this kind are but a drop in the ocean compared with the millions who live in dire ignorance. Even in such a state, however, they do exert a tremendous influence upon the life of the people. People do not know the facts when they make statements

that the women of India are treated like slaves and have no voice in the running of affairs. They do have a say, and a very strong one, in all social and religious matters. What a tremendous influence they would exert if only they were given an opportunity and an equal chance with men! And what a generation of people there would be if only the women of India were educated along right lines!

It is not our concern here to discuss the education of city women, although this much must be said, that the kind of education now given to women needs a wholesale revision. They are given the same kind of academic education as is given to men, with no provision for home economics and for those sciences especially suited to and required for Indian women. The social and religious customs are very different from those in Western countries. The problems, too, are different. There is not the problem of the surplus of women over men which calls for the economic necessity of women's earning their own living and competing with men. The main problems are the taking proper care of the home, the food and the children. In these the women of India have to be properly instructed. Cultural subjects, such as music, literature and art, must also have their place, but not at the sacrifice of instruction which is essential to the well-being of the country.

*The Women's Movement and Women's Societies.*—The women of the villages are more conservative and orthodox than the men, and offer the strongest opposition in bringing about any social reform in the communities. If only they can be converted we shall have solved more than half the difficulty of rural reconstruction. The organization of women's societies and clubs is, therefore, of vast importance.

Of late years the women's movement has made very rapid progress throughout India, and has penetrated even into some of the villages. In this connection, in Bengal, the work of the Saroj Nalini Association is worth mentioning. This Association was founded on a very small scale by the late Mrs Saroj Nalini Dutt, wife of an Indian Civil Service official. Since

her death her husband and numerous friends and admirers have organized the Association and have put it on a permanent basis. The Association, although still in its infancy, has already established branches in a number of towns and villages in Bengal, and is doing very valuable and useful work among the women. The Association has its headquarters in Calcutta, where arrangements have been made for the training of women in industrial arts and crafts, and in social work of various kinds. The chief activities of the Association are:

Training of midwives.

Establishment of child-welfare centres and clinics.

Public health work.

Social work among the women of the village.

Collecting clothes for the poor and needy.

Intervention in the evils of marriage customs.

Educational work among the adult women and among girls of school-going age.

Organizing of dramatics.

Bringing about intercommunal unity.

In the few centres in which the Samities (organizations) have been established much has been accomplished in these activities. Most of these centres are in towns. In villages they have not been quite so successful, because the number of women of leisure in the villages is extremely small, and it is probably safe to say that there are few women even in the wealthy families who can be called women of leisure. Their life is one of toil and unremunerative drudgery. On account of the primitive condition of the kitchens and lack of even the simple conveniences in the homes, and on account of centuries of customs and traditions, even the women of middle and wealthy classes perform the simple household duties with their own hands, which keeps them busy from early morning till late at night. They rise at dawn, go to the tank and take their bath and fetch water, and perform their morning worship; then they husk the paddy (unhusked rice) required for the day's use, and begin their cooking. It is sometimes far into the afternoon before they are free from cooking and from the washing of dishes. If they have any leisure they spend it in

gossiping or in spinning. The women of the artisan class help their husbands in their occupations. They, too, have no leisure on account of the primitive methods employed in all their occupational and domestic work.

A good deal of this household drudgery can be avoided by the introduction of simple, improved and inexpensive household equipment, enabling these women to use their time more profitably and take part in the activities of women's clubs, which would help them to live more economical, more sanitary and more healthful lives. They will then have time for creative work in arts and crafts and for various kinds of skilled labour, which will be much more remunerative than the unskilled, laborious and useless toil in which they are engaged from morning till night. The objectives of the Saroj Nalini Association, if followed, will certainly bring about a decided change in the village life and in the whole tone of the rural communities.

Besides the activities mentioned in connection with the Saroj Nalini Association the women's societies could, with the assistance of the local Health Officer and a trained midwife and nurse, occasionally hold a baby-week. They can learn about health and other questions through women's magazines, books and pictures; they can invite authorities to speak to them on the evils of early marriage, purdah and about birth-control. While discussing these questions they can be learning some crafts, such as weaving, sewing, embroidery, etc., and thus economize their time. The literate among them could read to the others from books and magazines, and also help them to read and write. Once their interest is roused it will not be long before most of them will be able to read and write themselves.

For the education of the village women, we may classify them according to their social standing and needs:

1. The women from the wealthy families.
2. Women from the middle classes, not so much from the point of view of their castes as of their economic condition.
3. Women of the lower castes, who, in addition to their domestic duties, have to help their husbands in the fields or

as labourers, and who thus pay nearly half of the family expenses.

#### 4. Widows from the middle classes.

Certain phases of education will have to be common to all these women irrespective of their caste or social standing, such as the care of children, personal hygiene, sanitation, care and preparation of food, care of home, the family budget, treatment of simple ailments, and the appreciation of beautiful surroundings in the home and in the village.

Mrs H. Davies, in her essay, "Women and Adult Education," speaks of the education of women in the following terms:

The wives and mothers of a great race should not merely cook and clean and mend and nurse for their husbands and children. They should be able to develop and maintain that keenness of brain and interest in things outside the home which alone can preserve a real comradeship between husband and wife, and which is essential, if there is to be that friendship and community of interest between mother and children which will save them so often from the wandering paths that lead to disaster.<sup>1</sup>

Through the activities of such women's clubs, then, India will have a race of women who, while still ministering to the health, welfare, and comfort of their husbands and children, will be the intellectual comrades of their husbands and the friends of their children. As mothers they will be in sympathy with the activities and interests of their children, and will be able to help them in their problems.

*Training the Women in some Crafts.*—As formerly stated, there is perhaps hardly any middle-class family in the rural areas which has not to support some widowed relative and her children. Sometimes the number of such dependents is quite large, and perhaps there is only one earning member in the whole family. The condition of the middle-class people in many instances is even worse than that of the labouring classes. They have to keep up a certain amount of respectability; and, poor though they may be, they cannot go to work as labourers, nor would the womenfolk be allowed to work as domestic

<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge Essays on Adult Education*, pp. 139-140.

servants in the homes of the wealthy. In nearly all cases these people at one time were in a flourishing condition, but for one reason or another they have met with misfortune. In such families it is very necessary that the women, particularly the widows, in addition to receiving instruction in the sciences already mentioned as being common to all women, should be taught some craft, by means of which they might be able to augment their family income, thus relieving the earning male member of much care and anxiety, and themselves enjoy a certain amount of independence. Crafts such as weaving of mats and carpets, garment-making and embroidery could be easily introduced. The local women's organization or the co-operative society could take care of the marketing of finished products. If each village could form an organization they could make arrangements with the Bengal Home Industries Association in Calcutta for the sale of their goods. The same organizations would help them in the purchasing of raw materials, and advise them as to the design of the articles according to the demand in the market.

The women of the lower castes, too, instead of always having to work as labourers, can learn some of these crafts and thus improve their economic condition.

### *Education of Girls*

The Child Marriage Restraint Act, commonly known as the Sarda Act, has put down fourteen years as the minimum age at which girls may marry. So far, the few girls who did have an opportunity of going to school, especially in the rural areas, stopped their schooling as soon as they were married, which was usually at a very early age. This meant a large percentage of the total number of school-going girls in the rural areas could not even go to school because of early marriage. But with the passing of this Act girls can now remain at school at least up to their fourteenth year, and can have at least from five to six years at school.

*The Curriculum.*—The curriculum of the girls' schools in the rural areas has to be prepared according to the needs of the village girls. Certain things are, of course, common to all the girls' schools whether they are rural or urban. So far, no differentiation has been made between the curriculum of the boys' and of the girls' schools, except that in some of the girls' schools they have needlework. The curriculum consists chiefly of the three R's. The care of the home and of the children has not yet attracted the attention of the educational authorities. It should be kept in mind that all the girls are going to be married and are going to keep homes. Their training, therefore, whatever else it may be, should at least include the care of the home. These girls who are going to be future mothers should know something about nutrition, and how to make up a good and balanced diet. They also need to know about clothing and how to make it. Instruction in cooking and sewing should always have with them their economic side, so that they may learn to prepare the family budget in the most economical way possible. Emphasis should be laid upon the waste involved in spending money unnecessarily on ornaments, marriage and other ceremonies. As a rule the women of India are very thrifty, but where social and religious questions are concerned the traditions are so deep-rooted that they would not mind their husbands going into debt. Through a well-organized curriculum the futility of all these unnecessary expenses can be made clear to these girls. It is only through such an education that we can expect these wretched customs to die out and thus save the country from needless waste. Music, literature and art should also be included in the curriculum of the girls' schools.

So far as possible some craft should be taught to the girls. It may be some kind of needlework, sewing, embroidery, and the weaving of cotton mats. These crafts will be found very helpful to those who may become widows and may not be allowed to remarry. They will, then, have something to fall back upon, and not be entirely dependent on their poor relatives.

The curriculum should also try to enlighten the girls with regard to the legal aspects of property and inheritance. Sometimes poor and innocent women are greatly exploited by their relatives because of their ignorance.

In short, the curriculum of the girls' school should be prepared keeping in mind the picture of a girl developing into a mother and becoming the head of a family, ruling and governing the social and religious customs, and having different problems to meet in life. As in the case of boys, habits of hygiene, of food, and of other ways of living; attitudes towards themselves, towards members of their families and towards members of their village; and skill in the preparation of food, clothing, and in the learning of arts and crafts should be developed. Unless these girls are prepared in their schools to meet the exigencies of life their education cannot be said to be complete.

*Teachers.*—Perhaps the biggest problem in the education of girls in rural areas is the lack of women teachers. While university graduates and trained teachers can be found for city schools, it is almost impossible to secure suitable and trained teachers for the village schools. The main difficulty lies in the question of these teachers living alone in a village. So far the teachers have been drawn from outside the villages, and so for the most part are strangers among the village folk. Public opinion has to be educated in regard to this matter, and especially with regard to the training of widows from middle-class families, so that they may take charge of the schools in their own villages. This would solve a twofold problem—that of finding teachers, and of providing some work for the poor widows. To persuade a woman teacher to go to a strange village is not possible, first because of economic reasons, and secondly, and more strongly, because of social restrictions. The women teachers, therefore, in nearly all cases have to come from the villages in which they live.

Another and an easy solution often offered is for the girls to go to the boys' school. This, again, has its problems. Most

people are not yet prepared to send their girls to the boys' school. But the more important reason why such a plan would not be satisfactory is because of the differentiation in the curriculum; the subjects in a boys' school are taught by men teachers, while the special subjects for girls can be taught only by women teachers.

For elementary and primary schools women are the best teachers. In the United States and in Europe nearly all the teachers of the elementary schools are women. They are much better fitted for handling little children than men are. We may continue to have men teachers for our elementary schools for boys; but for the teaching of girls women are required.

The greatest obstacle, however, in procuring and preparing the women teachers is that of finance, the lack of which is the greatest hindrance to the extension of educational facilities for both boys and girls.

*Literature for Women and Girls.*—There is a great need for literature for women and girls. Text-books are about the only books available, and they are of very little value. The few that might be found useful are beyond the means of an average village child and his parents.

Speaking about text-books, the Royal Agricultural Commission made the following observations:

There appears reason to believe that Text-Book Committees in general are apt to dissociate themselves from any responsibility for securing the supply of the right class of text-books, and to confine themselves to the rôle of censors. It would also seem that in some instances they find it too difficult to resist the prejudices of Local Authorities and the importunities of the authors of school books. We advise that the authors of school text-books should not be nominated to Text-Book Committees.<sup>1</sup>

Dr Zia Uddin Ahmad, speaking about female education, and particularly about books for use in girls' schools, says:

The first practical step for the spread of female education is to follow the practice of France, and organize a separate branch in the office of the Director of Public Instruction under a special officer

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Royal Agricultural Commission*, pp. 527-528.

with an advisory committee. Special allotment of funds should be made for female education in Provincial, Municipal and Local Board Budgets. The grant-in-aid rules for girls' schools should also be revised and put on a more liberal basis. . . . If this method is followed by the Government, the question of female education in India will receive the attention it needs. Even if the Government does not follow this recommendation (or system) it can at least appoint a special committee for prescribing some special books for use in girls' schools. So far, there have been practically no special books prepared for girls.<sup>1</sup>

The Department of Public Instruction, in collaboration with the Department of Public Health, could bring out inexpensive literature, pictures and charts dealing with the problems of women and girls, and these might be made available to the village women and girls at a reasonable cost, or they could be supplied to the women's societies, through which they could be available to all the women and girls of the village.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is no exaggeration to say that the keynote to India's progress lies in the education of her women. The social evils—caste distinctions, early marriages, non-marriage of widows, and numerous other customs—are in the way of progress. The complete ignorance of Indian women in regard to hygiene, maternity, care of infants and birth-control is another factor which is not only responsible for the high infant mortality, but also for the loss of health of both adults and children. The conservatism of Indian women in matters of religion, which borders on superstition, is again responsible for the tremendous amount of economic waste.

All these evils, unsanitary living and religious superstitions are due to ignorance, and the one and only way to progress lies in the education of women and girls; and not until they are educated can we hope for any effective change in the moral and material progress of the country.

<sup>1</sup> Zia Uddin Ahmad, *Systems of Education in England, Germany, France and India*, p. 265.

## CHAPTER XI

### VOCATIONAL TRAINING AT THE INSTITUTE

THERE are a number of Junior Technical Schools and one Agricultural School in the province financed by the Government, and a few by private organizations. They offer training in elementary mechanical engineering, carpentry, weaving, tanning, smithing, canework and agriculture.

The Institute, in giving vocational training, is by no means attempting to duplicate the work of the Government and of other private organizations. The recent introduction of agriculture into some of the middle English and high schools might to a certain extent take care of some of the boys who wish to learn improved methods of agriculture. But even then, in agriculture as well as in other vocational subjects, there is plenty of room for many more technical schools, particularly for the artisan class—that is, for those who intend to earn their livelihood by means of these trades.

#### *Students and Apprentices at the Institute*

There is a wide difference in the qualifications and aims of the students and apprentices who come to the Institute for vocational training. Their qualifications differ from illiteracy on the one side to a couple of years of college work on the other. Similarly their aims also differ, from being practical farmers and artisans to teachers of vocational subjects.

It is therefore almost impossible to classify these students and apprentices into uniform groups, for there will always be some who cannot fit perfectly into any classification that we may make. For practical purposes, however, we may classify these students and apprentices according to their previous academic qualifications and according to the purpose for which they come. Besides the differences in qualifications and aims, time is another factor which makes it still more difficult to make the classification satisfactory. The period of training for

which the different classes of apprentices come varies from three months to two years. Considering all these difficulties, then, we may divide these students and apprentices into three groups:

1. *Teachers from Different Schools.*—The general qualifications of these teachers from primary, middle English and high schools range from vernacular upper primary to high school and sometimes even to college standard. They come to prepare themselves for teaching vocational and industrial art subjects in their schools. In addition to teaching these subjects they are also expected in most cases to take charge of the Scout organization work in their schools, and in some cases to help in the work of rural reconstruction. The period for which they come ranges from three months to a year, and in a few cases even up to two years.

2. *Workers from various Social Service Organizations.*—The qualifications of these people also vary, but on the average they are up to the high school standard. They are going to be propagandists, whose main function is to give demonstrations and lectures on topics of health, agriculture and cottage industries. The period for which they come also varies, from about six months to a year.

3. *Artisans.*—The apprentices who come under this class are those who are planning to follow one of these vocations as a means of livelihood. Their educational qualifications have a much wider range than those of any other group—from those who are quite illiterate to those who have had even a college education.

### *The Present Curriculum*

Although the Institute has been offering training of a practical nature in agriculture and in several branches of industries, so far no definite and systematic curriculum has been worked out in any of the departments for the different classes of students and apprentices. Under the existing system, then, an apprentice comes, and after having an interview with the Director of the Institute is sent over to the particular

department in which he wishes to have his training. The programme of work, which is largely of a practical nature, is arranged by the heads of the different departments. A few lectures dealing with their practical work, and on elementary rural economics, sanitation and hygiene, are also given. Hardly any of them, however, are prepared in order to suit the different types of apprentices, nor are any definite goals or standards set up for these various groups. Considering all these differences one can understand that it is extremely difficult to draw up courses of studies which would suit these different groups. And yet, unless some curriculum is prepared, no effective training of any sort can be carried out.

### *Suggestions on Curricula and Courses of Studies*

Although detailed curricula for the different groups, and even for different individuals, will have to be worked out in order to achieve the maximum of efficiency, for general guidance the following outline may be found helpful and suggestive.

#### *General Courses (for all apprentices):*

Rural Economics, Rural Sociology and Co-operative Work.<sup>1</sup>

Health and Sanitation.<sup>1</sup>

Scout Organization and Recreation.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing.<sup>1</sup>

In the courses in Rural Economics and Rural Sociology special emphasis should be laid on the tenancy system, co-operative purchasing and marketing, investments and family budgets, and on the social problems. Under the existing conditions the middlemen take away most of the profits which should go to the farmers and artisans. The only way to ensure the maximum of returns is by means of co-operative marketing and co-operative purchasing of all farm and other products and requirements.

The inclusion of Health and Sanitation hardly needs any

<sup>1</sup> Field work in all these to be arranged by actual trips into the surrounding villages, by means of surveys of the village life, and by the organization of Scout troops.

explanation; while Scouting and Recreation are necessary for all the different groups. The use of Drawing in the learning of vocational subjects is quite essential, and therefore should form part of the general courses to be taken by all apprentices.

*Courses in Agriculture :*

Practical work on the farms.

Practical work on the individual plots.

Laboratory work, classroom lectures and discussions.

Visits to local farms.

With regard to the curriculum in agriculture the following points should be kept in mind:

(a) That the courses are arranged according to the different seasons of the year.

(b) That a chart is made with the map of the farms, and the different plots on them, showing the complete cycle of operations during the year—the different crops that are raised on them, the amount of seeds and yield of the different crops per acre.

(c) That a systematic and detailed course of studies be prepared for the different groups of the following:

The soils.

Methods of cultivation.

Farm implements.

Rotation of crops.

Manures and fertilizers.

Dry farming.

Irrigation and water-lifts.

Crop pests.

Cattle and dairy industries.

Poultry-keeping.

Sericulture.

The theoretical and laboratory work will depend entirely upon the educational qualifications of the different students, and therefore cannot be definitely fixed. They will, however, have the closest relation to their practical work.

Greatest emphasis should be laid upon the practical work, and for this purpose the apprentices will work not only on the

Institute's farms but also on their individual plots, or, in the case of poultry, they will raise and rear a small flock of chickens. Upon the success or failure of these undertakings their training will be tested and measured.

Besides agriculture these apprentices will also take at least two subsidiary industries which are most closely allied to agriculture—carpentry and weaving—the former in order to enable them to make and repair some of the farm implements, and the latter as a cottage industry to work on during the off seasons.

*Courses in Industries.*—The branches of industries in which the Institute has facilities for taking in apprentices are:

Weaving.

Carpentry.

Machine shop.

Lacquer-work, bookbinding and other crafts.

In the training of these branches also the work has to be of a practical nature, with just enough theory to explain and give meaning to the various processes. A detailed programme of work for each apprentice should be planned out, and all the various processes illustrated by charts, pictures and diagrams, showing the materials required in the making of the different articles, and the maximum and minimum amount of time required to learn each process.

In the learning of each process there should be definite goals set up, and the various steps and the means of reaching these goals laid out in as simple a language as possible, preferably in the language of charts and pictures, for the benefit of those who are illiterate.

Vocational training under the apprenticeship system involves skill and knowledge acquired under skilled workmen, and in which, although the greatest stress is laid upon the practical work, the theoretical side is not altogether neglected. When theory is not taught as an abstract thing, but is related to its practical aspects, and practice does not mean merely a series of mechanical processes, the students will find

stimulation, and will work with greater interest and intelligence. The practical and theoretical aspects of vocational training should therefore be closely related.

While giving vocational training to these apprentices their cultural education should not be neglected. As Mr Dover Wilson says: "There are two sides to every industry: the mechanical or technical and the human or administrative. For the second, training and ability are as necessary as for the first." The importance he gives to the cultural side of vocational education can best be described in his own words: "Machines without men are so much dead matter; men without minds are so many machines; minds unorganized, undirected and uninspired are nothing but a mob."<sup>1</sup>

Provision should therefore be made for meeting the cultural needs of these apprentices. These needs can be met not only through purely cultural subjects but also through subjects which are closely related to their own fields of interest, such as:

(a) Studies that will give a scientific understanding of the materials, processes, tools and machinery of their trades, but which will also open their minds to the wider issues of social and economic problems involved in the industry as a whole.

(b) Studies that would show the historic development of these industries and of the social problems arising therefrom.

(c) Studies that would give them an appreciation of art, and show them the place of art in life and industry.

Such courses would constitute the cultural aspects of vocational education. They will make social life and industry mean something wider, greater and deeper.

For purely cultural subjects the school at Santiniketan with all its various departments of literature, art and music, offers a good opportunity. These opportunities are already being taken advantage of by the apprentices at Sriniketan. By coming into closer contact with the students and teachers at Santiniketan they will not only develop their cultural life, but there will ensue a closer relationship between the city and

<sup>1</sup> Dover Wilson, *Humanism in the Continuation Schools*, p. 25.

the rural people, between the wealthy and the poor, and each will contribute his share and enrich the life of the other.

● In offering vocational training a few more points may be considered. They are:

1. How far the village industries have been affected by the big industries. This question has been fully discussed elsewhere in this study, and all the authorities on rural reconstruction are of opinion that the salvation of the rural population lies in their taking to cottage industries.<sup>1</sup>

2. How far the needs of the villages have grown and are likely to grow during the next decade or so in the light of the changing conditions. Going through the country districts and visiting the weekly markets, from the nature of the things that are sold there one can see that the needs of the village people are growing every day. The gradual introduction of improved agricultural implements calls for the need for their manufacture in the rural areas to eliminate the cost of production. The introduction of bicycles and automobiles and of numerous rice mills, which are to be found even in the rural areas, indicates the need for the rural people to know something about their care and repairs. The introduction of simple pieces of wooden furniture in the village homes, such as stools, chairs, benches and small tables; the introduction of better clothes, in the shape of shirts, coats, blouses and frocks—these and a great many other things are every day finding their way into the villages, and increasing the needs and the standard of living of the rural people. In the light of these growing needs, therefore, we have to plan our vocational training.

3. How far are these village industries going to run up against the machine-made articles? Since the products of these village industries, except the works of art, such as lacquer ware, village embroidery, etc., are going to be utilized by the village people themselves, there is not much danger of their coming into competition with the machine-made articles, which, although apparently cheaper than the home-made articles,

<sup>1</sup> Dover Wilson, *Humanism in the Continuation Schools*, p. 25.

are not really so because of the fact that most of these cottage industries are carried on during the time the people have nothing else to do, and are therefore an asset to the economic life of the villages.

4. How far are the village people ready to take to these industries? The number of young men and boys who have already come to get training in the different branches of the industries is sufficient evidence that the village people have begun to realize the value of these industries. In the learning of some of these industries they have even begun to break some of the caste restrictions. In the face of these facts, then, we can rightly say that the village people are anxious to learn these cottage industries if facilities are offered to them.

In the light of these conditions, and the growing needs of the rural people, vocational training should be such as would enable young men to earn their livelihood by means of improved agriculture and cottage industries; at the same time it should provide for their preparation for going into small workshops. The industrialization of the rural areas is not going to be for several decades to come; the exodus of some of the rural population into large factories, however, is inevitable, and the needs of the rural people are going to grow larger and larger every day in the light of modern civilization. In the planning of vocational education for the rural areas, then, we have to keep these points in view.

### *Methods and Techniques*

Methods and techniques are employed in the teaching of habits and skill:

1. For securing the maximum of efficiency with the minimum of expenditure of time and energy;
2. For non-wastage of materials;
3. For securing efficiency in learning; and
4. For giving meaning to what is taught.

In all walks of life, from that of the most unskilled labourer

to that of the greatest scientist and artist, certain methods and techniques are required. The unskilled labourer may be using very crude methods; while some people may not even realize that they use any definite techniques in their work, nevertheless methods and techniques are present in all their activities.

Apart from their academic and vocational qualifications, the difference between a successful and a poor teacher lies in the fact that one uses the proper methods and techniques while the other does not, although both may be equally skilled in their art or craft; and herein lies the great difference in their teaching abilities.

Many people make the mistake of thinking that, since vocational training requires merely the acquiring of manipulative skill and habits, they do not require any particular methods and techniques of teaching. While this training does require drill and manipulation of hands more than do other branches of learning, it is wrong to think that vocational training involves merely imitation, manual drill and repetition of processes.

Vocational training involves not only skill in manipulation, but use of the head as well. It requires observation, experimentation, thinking, planning, reading, and even mathematical computation.

While some of the devices and methods employed in the teaching of vocational subjects may be the same as those in the regular schools, it is obvious that there will have to be certain methods and techniques peculiar to this kind of teaching. They will be different because, in the teaching of manual arts and crafts, the pupils are able to see the materials and watch the processes right before their eyes—they see the teacher make a plan of the thing he is going to make; they see him lay out the materials and tools required, arrange them in their proper order, and then use them in the making of the article desired; or, in the case of agriculture, they watch and help in the laying out of the field, in measuring, ploughing

and preparing it for the planting of seeds, and so on. In the regular schools, while we do want the pupils to learn from experience, it is not always possible to give them first-hand experience in everything, and in most cases we have to be satisfied by giving the pupils second-hand experience. In the training of vocational subjects, however, it is not possible to teach anything except by actual experience.

The methods which will be found most useful in teaching vocational subjects are:

The demonstration method.

The illustrative method.

The performance method.

In all these the students will not only be getting information about the things they are going to make, but they will be actively thinking, observing, experimenting, measuring, computing and acquiring skill in the making of things.

It should be further noted that whatever trade the students or apprentices may be engaged in—it may be the work on the farm or in the workshop—the best results will be obtained if their work is divided into small units, and a job analysis of all these units is made, with all the different processes involved in working them out. These units should not be separated and divorced from each other, but each should develop as a natural and psychological growth out of the other.

Due consideration should be given to individual differences, aptitudes and interests of the different apprentices, and proper arrangements should be made for their guidance. Vocational guidance has not yet found its way into the educational institutions of India, and often young men waste a considerable amount of time, energy and money in following an occupation for which they have no particular aptitude. There should also be set up minimum standards for the learning of different crafts, and the maximum amount of time required to master them.

The students should also keep a careful and systematic

record of all their work in their diaries, which should be freely illustrated with charts, drawings, pictures, and specimens of yarn, cloth, wood, and with any other article that might aid in recording and understanding the various processes learned. These diaries, if properly checked and supervised by the instructors, will become the reference books of these apprentices; for very few of them will be able to afford to buy books on the different technical subjects, even in their own vernacular. Moreover, an intelligent account of the work which they have done themselves will be far more valuable and understandable to them than any text-book.

### *Organization and Administration of Vocational Education*

Since the function of each of the departments of agriculture and industries in which vocational education is being offered is fourfold—research, commercial, educational and extension—it is not reasonable to expect the people in charge of these departments to do equal justice to all these four aspects of their work.

The making up of the programme for each apprentice, or for a group of apprentices, the drawing up of the syllabuses, and the organization of the different courses, with the help of the different members of the staff who would be giving these courses, should be under the charge of a person who at least has had some professional training in teaching, and who would be able to guide and help the students as well as the apprentices in this educational work.

Under the present system the different departments have not fully co-operated in the educational work. Whatever the work of the different departments may be, that of education should be considered as the most important one, and the people concerned with the giving of the different courses should recognize their responsibility, and co-operate more fully in making this most important work a success.

## CONCLUSION

Since the vast majority of the population in any country has to earn its living, by means of some trade or profession, the problem of vocational education should receive even greater attention than that of ordinary education. In India, with more than 80 per cent. of the people engaged in agriculture and its allied industries, the problem should be given still greater attention.

So far, more thought has been given to those who continue their education up to high school or beyond high school grades, and not to those who drop off or never reach that stage. Their future is almost entirely neglected. Hence the importance of vocational training.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

It has been recognized by people of all ages and all countries that the teacher is the most important person in the training of pupils. It is he who makes or unmakes the school. The school buildings, the text-books, the equipment, and all that goes to make a school, cannot take the place of the teacher. The qualifications, the training, and the selection of teachers are therefore of the greatest importance.

The first and foremost consideration, then, has to be given to the training of teachers, who will also be community leaders in their respective villages. This requires not only better training facilities, and more training institutions, but also the provision of better salaries; for then only can better qualified teachers be had.

According to the official report of the Indian Statutory Commission, in Bengal the teachers in many of the aided schools can scarcely be said to receive salaries at all. In the Chittagong division, for example, the average remuneration of a teacher in an unaided school is Rs.3.3, and that of a teacher in an aided school Rs.6 per month.<sup>1</sup>

#### *The Present Qualification of Village School Teachers*

On account of such low salaries the Guru Training Schools (for teachers of village primary schools) cannot attract teachers of even middle school qualifications, which is their standard. Some of their teachers possess just bare literacy.

Out of a total of 61,132 teachers in primary schools for boys in Bengal only 15,671, or 25 per cent., are trained. The initial qualification of a large number of them is only up to the lower primary examination, or Class III., 3743 having

<sup>1</sup> One rupee is about 33 *ā*.

passed Class V., 11,763 having passed Class VI., and only 19.2 per cent. having passed Class VII. or Class VIII.<sup>1</sup>

The Report also states:

If the quality of the candidates applying for selection for training is low, so also is the quality of training. In most provinces the period of training is too short, the curriculum too narrow and the teaching staff inadequately qualified.<sup>2</sup>

There is no system of in-service training by means of which these village school teachers can secure further training, nor is there any system of supervision by which they might get some ideas regarding teaching methods and techniques. The inspectorial system is most inadequate from the teaching point of view. In most cases these inspectors themselves have not had any training in teaching, and they have far too many schools under them even to pay a nominal visit to each of them during the year. They are required to submit their reports, particularly on the number of pupils, their attendance, and the fees charged by the school. No aided school is allowed to have more than a certain number of free pupils. If there is any time left the inspector may examine one or two classes and leave his remarks concerning the inspection in the book provided for the purpose. He may find a class very low in a certain subject, and yet he has no suggestions to offer for better methods of teaching, chiefly because he does not know any himself.

Mr Michael West, in his book, *Education* (in Bengal), gives a very true and amusing picture of the visit of an inspector:

... the quality of the work is tested by a weary sub-inspector, who has trudged some four or five miles through the heat. He hears a boy read, and another class meanwhile does a sum which he has written on a slate or a much pitted blackboard. The boys stumble occasionally in the reading. The sum is done wrong by the head boy in the class; all the rest copy him, and so they are all wrong. The sub-inspector writes: Reading—fair; arithmetic—bad.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Statutory Commission Interim Report*, tables xxxvii. and xxxviii., p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Statutory Commission Interim Report*, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> Michael West, *Education*, p. 160.

This goes on from year to year, without any effort on the part of the inspector to improve the quality of teaching. It is the fault neither of the boys nor of the teacher; it is the weakness of the inspector, who has no constructive methods to offer the teacher as to better ways and technique in teaching.

### ● *Qualifications of Teachers in other Phases of Village Life*

With regard to the qualifications of these teachers in other phases of village life their training is absolutely zero. They have no training, even in elementary sanitation and hygiene, in scientific agriculture, in the work of co-operative societies, or in rural economics and rural sociology.

In spite of such poor qualifications, however, they are, in most cases, considered men of letters in these villages. If a document of some kind is to be written or deciphered it is the schoolmaster who has to be approached. In case of an epidemic, however, or an insect pest among the crops, he is as helpless and as ignorant as the rest of the people. With regard to sports and games, not only have most of these teachers never taken any part in them, but in some cases they even exhibit a decided abhorrence of them, and do not approve of the pupils taking part in them.

If there were facilities in training in these different phases of village life, and a reasonable salary provided, it would not be difficult to attract even high school graduates to the village schools as teachers; for nowadays, due partly to the unemployment situation among high school, college and university graduates, and partly due to the nationalist movement, many public-spirited young men are willing to go back to their villages and take an active part in the uplift of the rural communities. This idea of public service is more marked, perhaps, in Bengal than in any other province. Bengal has often been called the brain of India; it is becoming a hand also. Only when the work of these two organs is co-ordinated can

anything be achieved in uplifting the masses from ignorance, poverty and disease.

Whatever the work may be, that of a teacher or that of a leader, there is need of professional training; for no one can satisfactorily perform either one of these offices without having had a thorough training by way of preparation.

*Aim of the Institute to propagate its Ideals*

The criterion of any movement is the spread of its ideas, ideals and practices. The aim of the Institute of Rural Reconstruction is not to confine its activities to the Institute itself, or to a few neighbouring villages, but to spread them over the whole country. This can be done only by training teachers and others to be leaders in their respective communities, who will carry on the programme of rural reconstruction. In fact, on no one particular phase of instruction should the Institute lay so much stress as on the training of teachers and leaders. Without the attainment of this objective it cannot justify its existence. The attitude of the Institute in this respect is shown by a Resolution passed at the meeting of the Sriniketan staff as early as December 1922, during its very first year. The Resolution reads:

That in the opinion of the staff, and subject to the approval of the Sriniketan Samity (Executive Committee), the function of the Institute shall be regarded as twofold: (1) Education and (2) Extension. [And further:] That so far as its function of extension is concerned, and this shall be understood to include all activities relating to the re-organization or reconstruction of village life as well as to the building up of rural industries and the earning of its own income through agricultural or business enterprise, the department shall make it its duty to welcome and to stimulate to the full the co-operation of any other bodies, public or private, which can be of help in the forwarding of such extension work.

This extension work, as implied in the above Resolution, does not mean extension work carried on by the Institute itself. Rather it means the extension of the activity through teachers and leaders trained at the Institute.

For the training of teachers and community leaders, then, the following courses of study may be found helpful :

*Suggested Courses of Study and the Programme  
of Instruction*

1. General Course in Rural Education.
2. General Course in Rural Economics, Rural Sociology and Co-operation.
3. Sanitation and Hygiene.
4. Agriculture, Elementary Science and Nature Study.
5. Principles, Methods and Practice of Teaching.
6. Industrial Arts.
7. Scout Organization.
8. History and Civics.
9. Music, Art and Drawing.
10. Training in Leadership.

1. *General Course in Rural Education.*—The purpose of this course should be to impress upon the students the importance and need of education in the rural areas—to make them appreciate rural life by studying historically the civilization and the village life in India. Through this course the students will get acquainted with the old forest schools—their objectives and ideals; their exclusiveness, in being open only to pupils from higher castes; the nature of their education being too narrow and individualistic, not social, and therefore not suited to modern conditions. They should be led not to despise these schools, however, but to see the opportunity they offered of learning from nature.

In this course great emphasis should be laid upon the fact that we are living in a different age, which needs a different kind of education. While we cannot forget the glorious past of India, it is futile and even harmful to gloat over it, for thereby we are liable to lose sight of present-day problems and the evils that have crept into both the social and the religious life of the people.

Other objectives of this course should be:

1. To enable the students to understand the relation of the school and of education to rural life in all its aspects.

2. To have them make an actual study of the rural environment, and of the materials found in it which can be used for the education of the rural child.

3. To have them make a study of the rural people and their characteristics, their interests, needs and mental attitudes, with a view to interesting them in education and meeting their requirements.

4. To create in the minds of the students a love for the countryside, and to inspire them with the idea of service.

2. *General Course in Rural Economics, Rural Sociology and Co-operation.*—The rural people, although comprising more than three-fourths of the population of the whole country, have been exploited by the cities and deprived of all the benefits enjoyed by the city people. The prospective rural teachers, therefore, should know something of rural economics—how much the rural areas contribute towards the material wealth of the country and how much they get in return for the taxes they pay. The idea that has to be impressed upon the minds of the students is that it is rural India which is the backbone of the country, and it is upon rural India that the country's prosperity depends; that it is the teeming millions living inside the mud walls and thatched roofs, most of whom are getting scarcely one full meal a day, who are producing the food and raw materials, and even providing labour, not only for the city people of their own country, but also for the people of other countries.

The main objectives of this course should be:

1. To study the social and religious problems, with a view to seeing their relationship with the life of the people under present-day conditions.

2. To make a study of the different communities in the villages and their relationship to one another—what they are, and what they ought to be in order to improve village life.

3. To make a study of the advantages and disadvantages of rural life, with a view to finding out how best the people can

make use of these advantages and how they can remove and overcome the disadvantages.

4. To make a study of the rural and the urban life, with a view to bringing about a better understanding and appreciation between the two.

All these should be studied by the students, not only as teachers but as social workers and community leaders, so that, understanding all the social problems, they may go forth equipped for their work in the school as well as for their work in the community.

To achieve the best results frequent visits will have to be made to the villages, and intimate contact made with the village people to enable the students to study the problems at first-hand.

A brief study of the rural communities in other countries, their social life, and the effects of education on the life of these people, will be very instructive and beneficial to the students.

Without having made a study of rural economics and rural sociology the village teacher cannot be properly equipped to meet the different social and economic problems and to help the people to find their own solution of these problems.

As compared with some of the Western countries very little change has come about in the life of the rural people in India, except in the breakdown of the village industries, with nothing to take their place, and with extreme poverty as a result. Here also a comparative study of the economic life of the rural people in other countries would be of great help in getting the people out of the old ruts of tradition and social and religious customs.

The words of Dean Liberty Hyde Bailey, of the New York State College of Agriculture, apply equally as well to India as they do to America. He says that the problem of rural sociology is that of "developing and maintaining on our farms a civilization in full harmony with the best American ideals."

The whole aim of studying these subjects is to help the teachers to know the background of rural life, so that they

may be able to help the rural folk in "better farming, better business, and in better living."

Closely allied to the study of rural economics and rural sociology is the subject of co-operation. This is going to be the salvation of the rural population in India. Co-operation is not foreign, but is quite indigenous to the customs and traditions of the country. It is still to be found in one way or another in practically all the villages and communities. Mistrust stepped in only when the rural industries broke down. With the downfall of these industries the whole foundation of rural life gave way, and then began the exploitation of the already impoverished and ignorant people. It is chiefly because co-operation is in keeping with the ideals and practices of the country that it has made such rapid progress everywhere. Co-operation is the keynote of the material and moral progress of India, and the people are realizing its value more and more every day. The introduction of co-operative societies and co-operative banks has marked a new era in the economic, moral and physical (from the point of view of health) life of the people. Co-operation is freeing the peasants from the clutches of the moneylenders; it is also freeing them from the attacks of epidemics, such as those of malaria and cholera, and from many other preventable diseases; and it is also going to free them from many of the social evils which are the cause of their poverty and degradation. It is co-operation which is going to save the simple village folk from exploitation by the rich and powerful. As the watchword of co-operation says: "Each for all and all for each." It is only through this doctrine that the villages are going to have a new lease of life.

In this co-operation the village schoolmaster is going to take the lead. He will show the people its advantages. He will have to be acquainted with all the rules and regulations of the co-operative societies, and therefore he will need training.

3. *Sanitation and Hygiene*.—This course needs hardly any explanation, for it is a recognized fact that of all the desirable changes and improvements needed by the villages those of

sanitation and hygiene are by far the most important and most urgent. They have not yet found a proper place in the curriculum either of the village schools or of the teacher-training institutions.

Without a scientific and practical knowledge of the laws of sanitation and hygiene the village schoolmaster can do but little towards bringing about any change in the sanitary and hygienic habits of the people.

Children and adults have to be taught to form such habits if they are to improve their health and economic conditions, for everything depends upon the health of the people. It is chiefly on account of the ignorance of the people in regard to sanitation and hygiene that so many preventable diseases are prevalent among the village people. The countryside, which should be comparatively much more healthy than the towns or cities, on account of the ignorance of the people is unsanitary and unhealthy to live in.

The villages need better drainage, more sanitary disposal of waste and refuse, a clean and sanitary water-supply, and clean and well-ventilated houses. The schoolmaster, in addition to his work in the school, has also to be the village sanitary inspector and the village architect. With his army of school-children, who will have acquired sanitary and hygienic habits, he will carry out the sanitary programme of the village.

The details of the curriculum in sanitation and hygiene can be found in any text-book; but it is not so much the knowledge that is required as the practice of these laws. The village teacher, if he is to be a leader in the village, will have to show the people by his own personal example, by his own clean and well-ventilated and well-lighted house, with clean and beautiful surroundings, practically, and not merely in theory, the advantages of sanitation and hygiene.

4. *Agriculture, Elementary Science and Nature Study*.—The importance of these subjects in the curricula of the rural schools cannot be over-emphasized. The teacher is going to

teach in a community which is almost entirely agricultural. He has not only to make use of this agricultural environment as a basis for teaching almost everything in the school, but he will, if required, have to teach them as vocational subjects. As a community leader he will be constantly called upon to give advice to the farmers on their problems, and therefore he will have to know something about elementary science and scientific agriculture.

Through actual practical work on the school farm or garden, by solving the problems in the laboratory, and by means of readings, lectures and discussions, the students will gain the necessary knowledge of local crops and their cultivation, of the conservation and preservation of manures, of the flora and fauna of the locality, of domestic and wild animals, of birds and insects, and of the common lower animals of the field and garden.

Visits to farms in the locality, watching and recording the various operations and comparing them with the more scientific and labour-saving methods and devices, will also form part of this course. Other problems, involving the knowledge of elementary science, chemistry, physics, botany and zoology, will be brought from the farm into the laboratory, and their solution found there. All laboratory experiments will have a direct bearing upon what the students will actually come across in their daily experience in farm work.

One of the greatest contributions that the West has made to the East is that of practical science. In the East, nature has been worshipped as something powerful and supernatural, whereas the West has brought it under control, and has used it for the service of humanity.

This course will open the eyes of the students to the mysteries of nature; it will help to remove all superstition and ignorance, and will give them a better understanding of the rural environment.

5. *Principles, Methods and Practice of Teaching.*—Teaching is a profession. It is both a science and an art. In order to be a

successful teacher one must undergo training in both the art as well as the science of teaching.

Educators every day are laying more and more stress upon the training of teachers in the principles, methods and practice of teaching. The teaching staff of the Guru Training School, and even of some of the normal schools, is not adequately qualified to give satisfactory training in the modern methods and principles of teaching.

The teacher has to stimulate, encourage and direct learning. He has to collect and organize his material, and study the child's needs and capacity. All these require a scientific approach, for which the prospective teacher has to have special training. The teacher is concerned with mind, or rather "mind-body," and with personalities, not with inanimate objects. Psychology is still in its infancy as a science, and yet it has made great progress. From Rousseau, John Locke, Pestalozzi, Herbert and Froebel, to John Dewey in the present age, many new principles, methods and techniques in teaching have been introduced. Prospective teachers should be introduced to all these methods and techniques, and to the elements of psychology, if they are to be successful in their work.

In spite of the fact that many teachers have received so-called professional training, the methods of teaching have not changed in the least in the rural schools, nor for that matter in the urban schools, primary, elementary or secondary. The fault lies with the teaching staff of the training institutions. They are not adequately qualified to teach in the training schools and colleges.

In countries such as the United States of America more teachers of the elementary grades have had professional training than have teachers of the junior or secondary grades. This is because educators have come to realize that it requires more skill and better technique to teach little children than it does to teach the grown-ups. Provision should be made for these prospective teachers for practice teaching and for demonstration lessons. A number of village schools within

a certain area could be used for the former, while for demonstration purposes the experimental school at the Institute itself could serve the purpose. For training institutions elsewhere, model schools should be set up for demonstration purposes. Besides doing this practice teaching during their regular work, towards the end of the course these teachers should devote at least six weeks to practice teaching alone, living in the villages during this period and taking part in all its varied activities. Their success in their practical work as well as their success as leaders of the village community should be considered as the final test of their training.

6. *Industrial and Practical Arts*.—One of the aims of education is to give meaning to life and all that goes with it. We eat, drink, clothe ourselves, have some kind of shelter to live in, use some kind of transportation for going about, and have some means of exchanging our thoughts and ideas. All these involve the services of different people belonging to different trades and professions. By a study of food production, of the transformation of raw materials into clothing and places of shelter, and of the bringing of other necessities of life to our service, it is possible to give students a fuller meaning of these things, either by actual participation in their production or by means of demonstrations, by visits to factories, and by readings.

Dr Bonser has given three types of life objectives found in the study of practical arts. They are:

1. The usage of these products;
2. The social relationships to the producers; and
3. The intellectual appreciation of practical activities.

He defines industrial arts as:

The changes in the raw materials produced by agriculture, hunting, fishing and mining which make them more usable. . . . It (industrial art) includes all of the changes made in food materials, clothing, woods, metals and clay and other earth products.<sup>1</sup>

While in general these are the main objectives of industrial arts for children the world over, they would differ somewhat

<sup>1</sup> F. G. Bonser, *The Elementary School Curriculum*, p. 156.

in different countries according to the social and economic conditions of the people. The social relationships to the producers, for example, on account of the caste system, will be different in India from what they are in America.

Through industrial arts, then, besides the objectives listed above, some of the chief aims for Indian children should be to

1. Bring about a change in the social relationships of the children;

2. Teach them the dignity of labour;

3. Lead them on to a choice of their vocation, and enable them to acquire skill in the making of things, because most of these children will be following one or two of these practical arts as vocations.

There is quite a wide range of industrial arts which could be used to advantage in leading the rural children to an understanding and appreciation of occupations and materials, and which have social and economic values. They are:

1. Weaving in fibre, leading to basketry.
2. Spinning of yarn, weaving and dyeing.
3. Working in clay, leading to pottery and clay-modelling.
4. Working in leather, making of leather bags, purses, portfolios, etc.
5. Making of paper and cardboard articles, such as boxes, notebooks, portfolios, bookbinding, etc.
6. Gardening—flowers, vegetables and small-fruit growing.
7. Woodwork.

At least two or three of the above can be introduced in the village schools.

7. *Scout Organization*.—In order to be a successful leader of a community one must first be a leader of youth; and the best way a teacher can be a leader of youth and of children is by taking part in their sports, games and other recreational activities.

The objectives of scouting in the programme of teacher-training are (1) to train in Scout activities, physical, cultural and recreational, and (2) to train in leadership and in the social service work of the villages.

The physical well-being of the child is just as much a concern of the teacher as it is of the parents. With all the fresh

and open life of the country, it is most surprising that the village child of Bengal is physically much inferior to the city child, who, in most cases, has to live in much more unsanitary conditions. This is due chiefly to lack of sufficient nourishment, and in some cases to mal-nourishment. Of these the former is a result of poverty, the latter of ignorance. In some cases both poverty and ignorance are responsible for the unfortunate condition. The poverty of the village people makes it necessary for most of the children to be bread-earners at an age when they should be playing; and so the play period in the lives of these children is almost unknown. Games, sports and physical education should be introduced into the village schools for the purpose of providing recreation rather than for the purpose of developing muscles; and the children should be given the fullest opportunity to indulge in all kinds of sports and games. In order to organize these, however, the teacher has to be a sportsman himself, trained in the organization of games and sports. Besides these recreational activities of an athletic type the village children would have to be organized into Scout troops in order to carry out the social service work in the village. To achieve this, the training institutions would have to give adequate instruction in the organization of Scout troops and in leadership. Rural teachers are much more in need of such training than teachers in urban schools.

Field and practical work in scouting should be arranged by having each student organize a troop in one of the villages. While doing this he could also carry on his sociological and economic survey of the village. An approach of this kind would be necessary, for the village people are by nature very shy, and are suspicious of any stranger who comes to gather information on these subjects. These students, by means of their intimate contact with the children, would acquire the confidence of the parents, and thus get all the information they need for their studies.

Under Scout Organization should also be included extra-

curricular activities, their nature and the method of introducing them into the schools. The teacher himself must have some hobby, for only then can he succeed in getting the children to take an interest in outside class activities.

8. *History and Civics*.—History and civics are subjects which have been greatly abused by educationists. The history textbooks are records of wars, of conquests, and of the dynasties of kings and their viceroys. In the teaching of history, great emphasis is laid upon the memorizing of the dates of wars and the results of these wars. The teaching of history has created a very narrow type of nationalism, and has awakened the spirit of Imperialism in some people; in others, especially in the case of subject races, it has brought intellectual and political slavery to the minds of people. It has prejudiced some against all that is good and noble in their own country; it has made others unduly proud of their glorious past.

History has created antagonism among people of different religions; it has also brought about race hatred. And yet, as Bepin Chandra Pal has said, history is to the patriot what the Holy Scriptures are to the believer; and, as another author says: "Patriotism that is not nourished by history is like a religion that despises the support of scripture; it is without root, fantastic, unreal."<sup>1</sup>

It is very important that history, in all its various aspects—political, economic, commercial, social and religious—should form part of the curriculum of the teacher-training course; and emphasis should be laid upon the various causes that have led to the downfall of the country. In pointing out these causes one should not hesitate to bring out the social and religious customs and traditions which have been very largely responsible for the present state of affairs. In this course a brief survey of the history of some of the progressive countries and of their rapid development should be studied to enable the student to see more clearly the evils that lie within their own society.

<sup>1</sup> Hans Kohn, *A History of Nationalism in the East*, p. 394.

Closely allied with the teaching of history is the teaching of civics. People are more and more waking up to a political consciousness, demanding political rights and independence. Even the rural people of India are becoming more and more politically alert every day. The problems of government—even of a city municipality—however, are most intricate and complex. While the Government authorities are often to blame, the people also do not always understand the difficulties that confront the Government. Since the Reforms (the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms in 1917) a dual form of government has been set up, and the people have been given a certain share in the government of their own affairs, such as education, public health and sanitation. Even the village people are taking an active part in the affairs of the Government. They need to know something about the working of this Government, of the laws that govern Union and District Boards, the fields of activities given over to their charge, the taxes they are empowered to levy, and the obligations they have towards the villages in matters of public health, education, and the building and upkeep of country roads. The people have to be educated in all matters pertaining to their civic rights and responsibilities.

A spirit of citizenship, not based upon any party politics, should be created in the minds of the leaders of the village communities, and training in all questions of civic government should be given to them. Democratic ideals are spreading very rapidly even among the rural people, and it is very necessary that they should know the principles of democracy before they can put the ideals of democracy into practice. Civic education, when given, is often coloured with a certain amount of bias.

Education in civics should be based upon four cardinal principles:

1. That every person in the village, man, woman and child, irrespective of caste, should be given equal opportunity in the affairs pertaining to village life, according to his or her abilities.

2. That every member of the village, no matter what his or her position or occupation may be, has his or her responsibility towards the other members of the village community. That the interests of the whole village should come before the interests of individual persons.

3. That every person in the village is a citizen not only of his or her village but of the whole country, and should realize his or her responsibility towards the country.

4. That in order to be a good citizen one must have character, which comes from self-discipline, truthfulness, respect and regard for others, and from service to one's people.

10. *Training in Leadership.*—The village school teachers, if they are going to be leaders, need further training in organizing parents' associations, boys' and girls' clubs, women's clubs, and as many other activities as they are capable of engaging in and which they think should be introduced.

Through personal contacts they should discuss the problems of the school and of the community with the people; they should invite them to the school and call for their suggestions; they should co-operate with outside agencies, official or non-official, with regard to the improvement of the school and the development of the village. Hundreds of ways lie open to the teachers for obtaining outside help, if only they have the necessary training in leadership and in organization. They, however, need encouragement and support from the leaders of the community as well as from their own superior officers and other Government officials.

Their training would be further developed, and their experience further enriched, if they could meet teachers and leaders of other villages and discuss with them their different problems and exchange ideas. This could be done by dividing the district into a number of units, and having the teachers and leaders of villages in these units meet occasionally in conference. Each village should in turn be responsible for inviting this conference. About twice a year they could hold a district conference, to which teachers and leaders from all

over the district should go; and after that they might meet for a divisional conference once a year, which might be attended not only by representatives of district and unit organizations, but by as many teachers and leaders as could find time to go. The organization of these conferences should be in the hands of the village teachers themselves, with as little help as possible from outside. The programme should not be filled entirely with lectures by officials and experts, as is usually the case at such conferences, but more time should be devoted to discussions led by experts, in which the teachers themselves should take an active part, bringing forward their problems freely and asking the experts to give constructive suggestions.

There is an All India Federation of Teachers' Associations, but it is composed mostly of city high school teachers. An effective and lively organization of rural teachers is most urgently needed. The learned men of the cities have to come down from their high pedestals to the level of the humble village school teachers. They have the real problems of education and of the country to face, problems which are concerned not only with the courses of study but also with the very life of the people.

Since education is life, we should place greater emphasis upon the problems of life than upon the study of the various subjects.

### *Programme for the carrying out of the Objectives of Different Courses*

Modern philosophy is a philosophy of life, and of life in a modern world; and according to this philosophy no education should be divorced from life and life experiences. This modern educational philosophy also teaches us that in all our studies we must look for practical values; we must look to acquiring practice, not to accumulating a store of knowledge for its own sake. Further, in order to learn anything effectively, and with

a practical purpose, so far as possible we should learn by doing.

In order that the students might thoroughly understand and put into actual practice what they learn, the practical side of the courses should be emphasized.

In rural economics, rural sociology and co-operation the students going out into the villages should study at first-hand the problems they meet, make a systematic survey of these problems, bring them back to the Institute, discuss them among themselves and with their teachers, and offer constructive suggestions for their solution. In nearly every single problem they will run up against social and religious customs and traditions. Some of the students will be conservative themselves and will belong to the high castes. But if they are going to be pioneers and leaders in their communities they must be prepared to meet all opposition, and to take a firm stand against all these social evils and religious superstitions and fanaticisms. No progressive teacher or leader can undertake a programme without meeting opposition. "Freedom" is another thing which education is supposed to give. But most people confine the meaning of the term "freedom" to political freedom, and this they expect as a natural outcome of education. That may be: but before we can attain political freedom we must first have social and religious freedom. We have to free ourselves from the bonds of social and religious customs, from superstitions and corruption that have crept into both the social and religious lives of the people.

The practical values of sociology and economics, health and sanitation should lie first in freeing the students from the bondage of those social and religious customs which have been the greatest hindrances to the material and moral progress of the Indian people. These students are going to be instruments in bringing about this freedom among the village people. In order to do this they must first free themselves.

In sanitation, hygiene and Scout organization work the

students would be expected, as part of their practical training, to take charge of the general cleanliness and sanitation of their little community at the Institute, which would be their immediate field work, and they would be held responsible for it. With regard to the other laws of health, they would begin by practising them in their own lives by taking proper physical exercise, forming clean personal habits, taking proper care of their own houses and their surroundings, their lighting and ventilation; they would also see to it that their own dwelling-houses and their surroundings were free from flies, mosquitoes and rats. With regard to food and clothing, also, they would form the right habits. Only after successfully forming these sanitary and hygienic habits in their own lives, and in the life of their small community, would they have any chance of success in the villages. Having learned these sanitary and hygienic lessons by doing, they would, through the organization of their Scout troops, carry out their programme of sanitation and hygiene in the villages.

The Institute would also be a miniature copy of a village. It would have its own municipal and civil government, and all the civic training required would be learned in a practical way, through their taking an active part in the government of their little community.

In this way everything that they learned would have a definite practical bearing; it would be learned by doing, not simply through classroom lectures and reading of books.

One of the greatest faults of our educational system has been that there is too much theory. Undue emphasis upon knowledge for the sake of knowledge has produced a class of intellectual aristocrats who are satisfied with the mere knowledge of things, ideas and persons; with the practical side of this knowledge they have not concerned themselves.

Under the new system of education our teachers would have to be workers first; their intellectual attainments would be of secondary consideration.

*Facilities for such a Training at the Institute*

For the training of village teachers and community leaders in the branches described in the preceding pages, Sriniketan, with all its various departments, without any doubt is the best-equipped place in the whole province. It satisfies all the requirements of such a training centre. It is a non-political private organization, and has the support of the Government and the sympathy of the people. It is also non-sectarian; and its doors are open to all, irrespective of their affiliation with any organization, religious, official or non-official.

Already the Institute has given training to a number of teachers and social workers. With better organization and utilization of its own resources, and with more co-operation on the part of the various official and non-official organizations, it can be the leading training centre for village teachers and community leaders.

## CONCLUSION

Followers are not wanting; what is really needed is good leadership. The people have to be protected from self-made and self-seeking leaders, who are out to gain their own personal ends and who have not the interests of the village folk at heart.

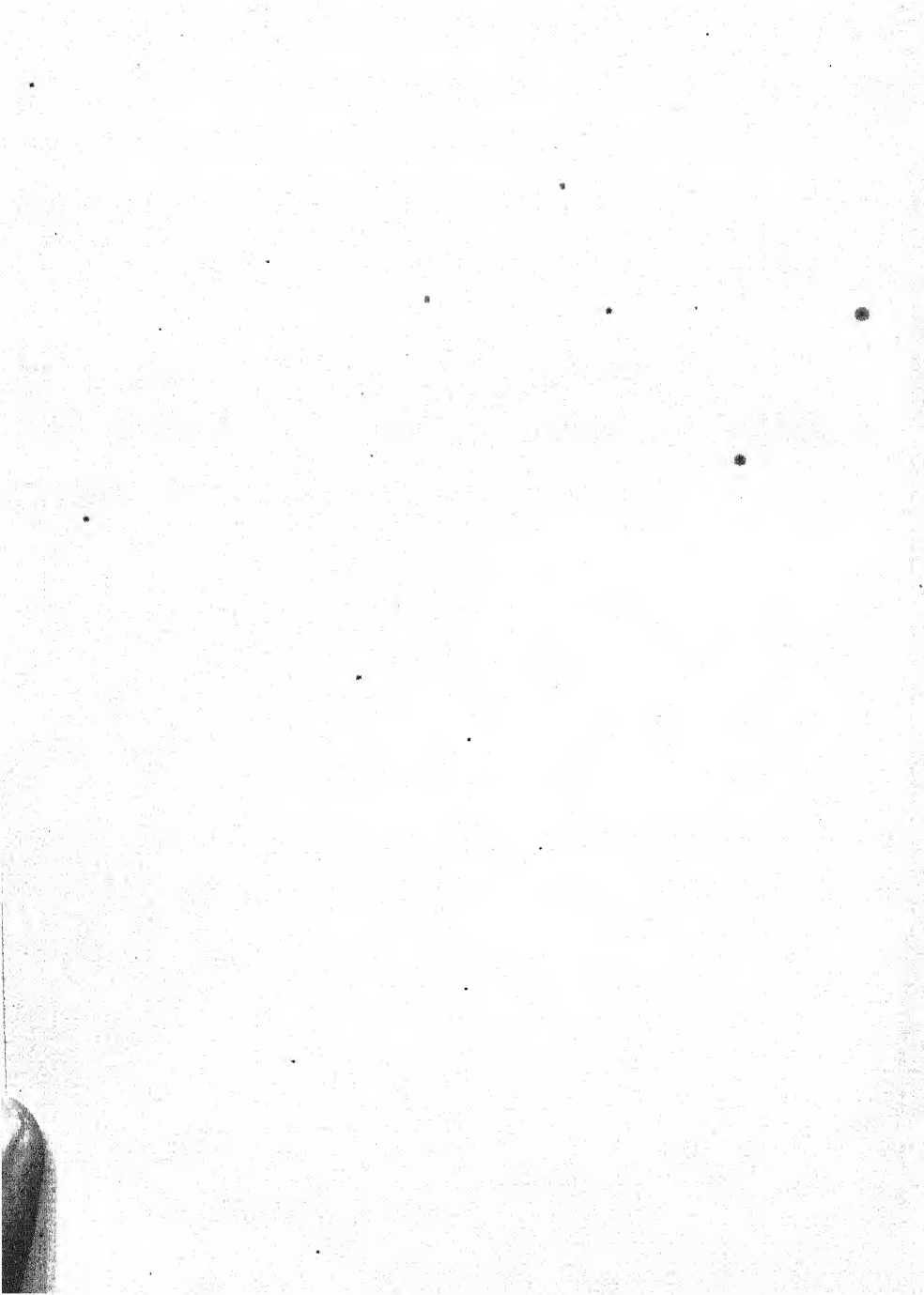
Real leadership requires not only good training but also a spirit of sacrifice. We need people who will work not for gain or fame, but for the sake of their country. This idea of service is very adequately expressed by Kipling:

And only the Master shall praise us, and  
only the Master shall blame;  
And no one shall work for money, and  
no one shall work for fame,  
But each for the joy of the working, and  
each in his separate star  
Shall draw the Thing as he sees it for  
the God of Things as they are.

India has been a land of saints and mystics, a land where renunciation has found favour, even with kings and princes.

Some of the greatest leaders—political, religious and social—have been recognized as such from their life of sacrifice and renunciation. The age for renunciation has not passed, nor shall it ever; it is in the very heart and soul of the people. We have an outstanding example of this renunciation and leadership in that great man, the uncrowned king of the millions of India, Mahatma Gandhi, who has never done anything for the sake of gaining name or fame. Name and fame just came to him; he could not get away from them. They did not turn his head in any way; on the other hand, they made him more humble, and gave him strength to go further and further in his sacrifices. There are a host of others whose names are on the lips of every Indian, and a still greater number of people whom the world does not know and who will never see their names in print, but who are silently sacrificing their lives in the service of their country.

In order to produce such leaders there have to be greater leaders at the Institute itself, not merely people of high qualifications, but people with a high sense of duty and with a spirit of service and self-sacrifice; people who, through their personal lives and example, would inspire the young men to take up the cause of the millions who need their help and guidance.



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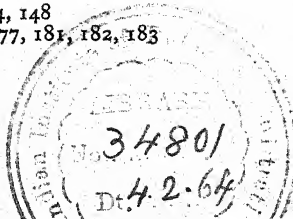
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